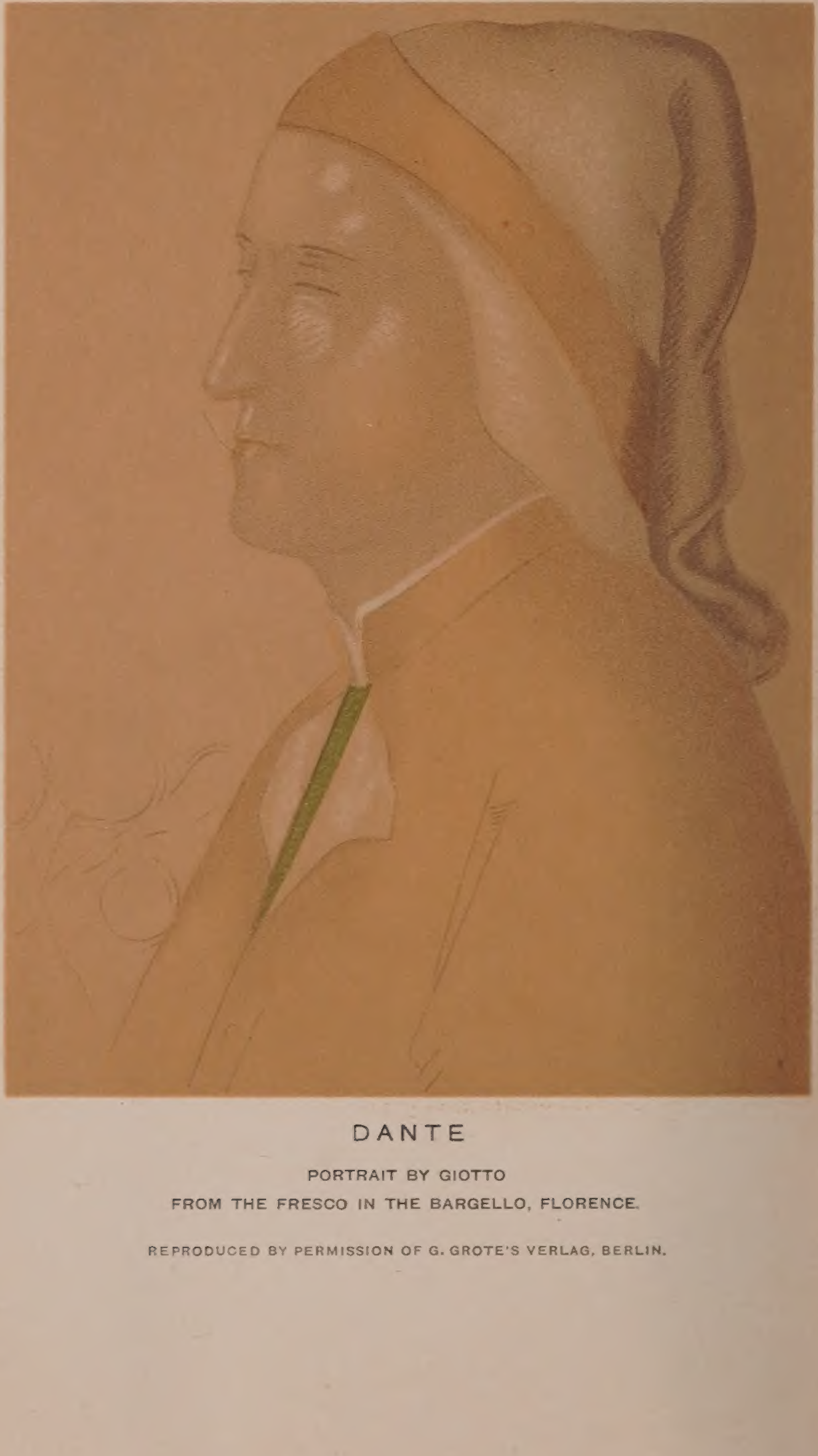
: DANTE :
AND : HIS : TIME

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DANTE & HIS TIME



DANTE

PORTRAIT BY GIOTTO

FROM THE FRESCO IN THE BARGELLO, FLORENCE.

REPRODUCED BY PERMISSION OF G. GROTE'S VERLAG, BERLIN.

DANTE & HIS TIME

BY

KARL FEDERN

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

A. J. BUTLER

AND ILLUSTRATIONS



LONDON

WILLIAM HEINEMANN

1902

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TO MY DEAR FRIEND

EDWARD FALCK

THIS VERSION OF MY BOOK

IS DEDICATED

INTRODUCTION

THE vogue which the study of Dante enjoys at the present time is a phenomenon somewhat difficult to explain. It is not part of any general interest in the Italian language and literature; which, in England at all events, still suffer under "the deplorable and barbarous neglect" perceived and lamented by Mr. Gladstone a quarter of a century ago. The immense interval, unparalleled in other literatures, by which Dante surpasses all other craftsmen in his mother tongue may perhaps to some extent explain this concentration of interest upon him; but it is no doubt mainly due to the way in which, as I have elsewhere said, he fills the stream of history from side to side. Follow almost what line you will of historical investigation, you will not carry it back into the Middle Ages without finding him upon it. I take down from my shelves books as various in subject as Humboldt's "Cosmos," Whewell's "History of the Inductive Sciences," Bryce's "Holy Roman Empire," Ueberweg's "History of Philosophy"; in the index of each I find the name of Dante Alighieri. Thus he is, of all the great poets of the world, the one who

takes most explaining; the one, it may almost be said, who most appeals to that love of solving problems and diving into mysteries which is with many people a motive nearly as strong as the passive enjoyment of poetical beauty. You never feel sure that you have got to the bottom of what a French writer has called "*les replis de son génie.*" This again sets him in a different class from all the most eminent of his successors. Allegory in Petrarch does not go beyond an occasional play on a proper name; nor does one look for mysticism in Ariosto.

Whether or not this consideration may be held to account at least in part for the popularity enjoyed by Dante, alone among Italian writers, in the taste of the present generation, it undoubtedly explains the immense mass of literature which has grown up around him, and to which recent years have contributed not less than their fair proportion. Dante affords exercise alike to the minute student who delights in tracing literary and personal allusions to their source, in verifying details of chronology, in philological and linguistic inquiries; to the student of theology and politics; to the philosopher, the man of science, the historian; even to writers with fluent pens and a turn for pious sentimentalism, or exposition of the obvious. So much indeed is written about Dante that is clearly superfluous, that one is in some danger of forgetting how much work yet remains to be done. No adequate edition, for example, existed till quite recently of any of the minor works; and though Messrs. Wicksteed and

Gardiner have just supplied this deficiency in the case of the Latin Eclogues, these, however interesting in themselves, represent the smallest fraction of Dante's subordinate writings. Professor Pio Rajna has dealt effectively with the text of the "de Vulgari Eloquentia," and it may be hoped that his explanatory comment will before long see the light and prove a worthy companion to his textual labours. But the "Convito," the "de Monarchia," the lyrical poems, all urgently demand for both text and matter the thorough and scholarly treatment which, if they had chanced to have been composed a thousand years earlier, they would in all probability have long ago enjoyed.

Another lack which has certainly been apparent in England is that of some biographical account of Dante which should present him not merely in relation to the actual time in which he lived, or even to the history of his own city, but to the course of general European history, of which the political, social, and religious position of affairs in his time was the outcome. A good deal of light has been thrown on all these points by recent research; of which, again, the results have been made accessible by such books as Signor Villari's "I Primi due Secoli della Storia di Firenze" and Dr. Davidsohn's "Geschichte von Florenz." A handy popular summary of what would be to Dante the past history of Christendom, giving in brief outline the sequence of political events in Church and State, the progress of speculative thought

and learning, the development of social conditions, with special reference to the transformation wrought in all these departments by the substitution of German for Latin hegemony—no better aid than this could be offered to the student who desired to look out on Dante's world so far as possible with Dante's eyes. Yet if he wanted anything of this sort, it was hard to say where, in English at all events, he was to find it; and he has all the more reason to be grateful to Dr. Federn for thus attending to his needs, after supplying those of his own countrymen. For it must be observed that the present volume is no mere translation, but a revised issue by the author himself in a foreign tongue of a work originally composed in his own. Every one must congratulate him in his easy command of an unwonted medium, and on the excellent results he has succeeded in producing in it.

It would be too much to say that all Dr. Federn's statements and inferences will command the unqualified assent of every "Dante-Forscher." The present writer would be prepared, if this were the place, to pick several crows with him. His views on the Beatrice question are perhaps not thoroughly convincing. But he is always reasonable; as far removed from the extravagant incredulity of some recent writers as from the unsupported imaginings that were indulged by an earlier school. He realises the essential grandeur of the Middle Ages with their daring speculation, their revival of interest in beauty of form and in the literary expression of reflection and

emotion, their robustness of thought and action. He indicates clearly, if briefly, the true questions at issue between the political parties in Italy, which had such important consequences for Dante; and points out the inadequacy of the old notion, still to some extent current, that Guelfs were in any sense either representatives of Italian patriotism or defenders of the rights of the Church.

When he comes to the division of his book which deals more immediately with Dante's personal record, we find the same sobriety of judgment, the same reluctance to overturn long-accepted opinions, so long as they do not involve a physical impossibility or conflict with well-attested facts, the same effort to put himself at Dante's point of view—a very different one, it may be remarked, from that of the average respectable person, the Monna Berta and Ser Martino, of contemporary society. He goes, perhaps, a little further than is necessary in distrust of Boccaccio; forgetting, it would seem, that any statements made by Boccaccio must have quickly come to the knowledge of scores of people who were well acquainted with the facts, and that neither his disciple Benvenuto nor any one else gives the least hint of any contradiction having been given to them. On the other hand, Dr. Federn lets us continue to believe in the authenticity of the traditional portraits, which attempts have been made to discredit. He accepts what may be called the Canon of Dante's writings, without any of that shallow scepticism, usually based on imperfect knowledge, by which

sciolists seek notoriety. His book will be all the more acceptable to English and American students, among whom such vagaries have seldom found much favour.

Another point with which Dr. Federn seems to me to deal more satisfactorily than most biographers of Dante is that of the phases through which his intellectual and still more his spiritual nature had to pass, "before the author of the 'New Life' could become the poet of the 'Divine Comedy.'" He dismisses Witte's famous theory (which, indeed, few would now be found to support) that these two works with the "Convito" form a "trilogy" in which Dante's passage from the simple faith of childhood through a period of doubt to the reasoned belief of maturer years, is set forth; on the ground that we have no evidence that Dante was ever anything but a devout Christian. But he realises that a great revulsion did at some time take place in him; without which, indeed, the great scene of confession and contrition at the end of the "Purgatory" is unintelligible. And, though he does not use the term, he is clearly aware that this was of the nature of what, in the language of one religious school, is called conversion or conviction of sin. There is no reason that a person in order to undergo this experience should be conscious of any unusual depravity; and there is no need to suppose that the words put by Dante into the mouth of Beatrice on the occasion in question are meant to imply anything of the kind. Chapter V. of the second part of this book makes it plain that Dr. Federn is on the

right track in regard to this subject, a due understanding of which will prevent many misconceptions. For instance, no one who has grasped its full significance will ever be misled by the theories, so dishonouring to Dante, which would involve him in discreditable love-affairs at Lucca, in the Casentino, or elsewhere, after the supposed date of his vision.

No two readers come to Dante with just the same eyes; and when the readers are of different nations the chance that one will see what the other might miss is at least doubled. For this reason alone an attempt like this of Dr. Federn's would deserve a welcome; but I hope that I have said enough to show that its claims to our consideration are based on something more than the mere advantage to be derived from the comparison of various points of view. It has substantive merits of its own; and no English student of Dante will regret having given it his hospitality.

ARTHUR JOHN BUTLER.

April 1902.

PREFACE

In the "Deutsche Rundschau" Hermann Grimm has elaborated the thought that only four poets belong truly to the literature of the world: Homer, Dante, Shakespeare, and Goethe. Of these Dante, though standing nearer to us than Homer by twenty centuries, is the least known. Nor is this to be wondered at. He himself, in the second canto of the Paradise, warned the readers of his own time, who were not fully equipped up to his level, with the words:

O ye who follow me in little boat
  On this my voyage, eager still to hear,
Behind my ship that sings as she doth float,
  Turn now and look where yet your shores appear;
Into the wide sea put not out, lest ye,
  Losing me, should have nought whereby to steer.
Where my course lies, none yet has roamed the sea!

To us his work is the most mysterious of a time that loved mystery. It is founded on ideas and conceptions of the world which for the most part have vanished completely from the life of modern men. All the many allusions to contemporary events, all the innumerable names, which made the book appear richer and livelier to the mediæval reader, are for us, who do not know the

names nor understand the allusions, so many obstacles and dead passages, which weigh upon and disturb the reader; while a commentary is deterrent.

"In Dante's poem," said Carlyle, "ten silent Christian centuries have found a voice." One must know these centuries in order to understand the poem. Dante is the Poet of the Middle Ages. But the latest flowers and the ripest fruits betoken the rise of a new generation; Dante is also the poet of the early Renaissance. We must know the remarkable men of this remarkable time, one must know what occupied them, how they looked upon the world and lived in it, what were their aims and what ways they took to carry them out, what they thought and believed, learned and taught, what seemed of importance to them in their lives; what happened in their world; its movements, its great struggles, its petty interests.

We should know their towns, their houses and streets, the garments they wore, should know how they slept and what they ate, how they solemnised wedding and funerals. We must follow them to their halls and assemblies, to the churches, where they worshipped with their fellows, to the cells, whither they fled from the world.

In the following book I have tried to give briefly a few lifelike pictures of all this; pictures which I drew from my studies of Dante, especially from the documents of his own time, its chronicles, poems, and images—pictures which I saw as I read Dante.

These I have tried to give as concisely as possible. To the reader who knows them, the things which occupied Dante will appear matters of course, and even if he should miss a name or not know an event alluded to in his works, he will conceive the meaning as well as we understand allusions in our daily papers and books to

events and matters foreign to us, from their connection with the world that we know.

The second part of my book follows Dante's path through that dim and distant world which to us is but half-illuminated—the path of his life, which is the road to his works. In this manner the second part will be a subjective reflection of the first.

My object has not been to give the fruits of original research or critical discussions of doubtful matters. Especially in the first part I have mostly worked out the results of other people's investigation. Yet I hope to have given some new points of view. I wish to express my debt to Dr. Robert Davidsohn of Florence, who had the kindness to revise a portion of my book and to give me some valuable data out of his new investigations of Florentine history; I am likewise indebted to Lieut.-Col. Paul Pochhammer of Berlin for kindly revising other parts of the book, and I wish to express my thanks to the English friends who have assisted me in the translation of this edition.

My work will not lead into the last depths of the poet and will but indicate his riches. Though whole libraries could be filled with the books written on him, they have not exhausted his abundance. All the treasures of beauty and the most wonderful of his mysteries the reader must look for in Dante's own work. Inadequate translations have been a greater obstacle to this than the enigmas of the poem. Much more than *ponderous commentaries*, the stiff structure of our translations has kept Dante a stranger to us. Beauty of sound and the power of feeling conquer the reader, and mysteries and scholasticism are borne forward on the music of the verse. But no translation will ever do justice to Dante's works. Dante himself

says in the "Banquet": "Therefore let everybody know, that nothing that is brought (or made) to harmonise in the musical bonds of verse can be translated out of one language into another without all its harmony and sweetness being broken." And Shelley wrote five hundred years later in his "Defence of Poetry": "It were as wise to cast a violet into a crucible that you might discover the formal principle of its colour and odour as seek to transfuse from one language into another the orations of a poet. The plant must spring again from its seed, or it will bear no flower—and this is the burthen of the curse of Babel."

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PART I

THE TIME

CHAPTER I

THE DESTRUCTION OF THE ANTIQUE

The period of history which is called the Middle Ages opens with the spread of Christendom, the decay of the Roman Empire, and the entrance of the German race on the scene of history.

These three elements, different in their origin, but interwoven in their course and connected in their effects, filled the time from the fourth to the ninth century. The German tribes conquered one province of the empire after the other and Germanised them to a certain extent; they formed the stock of their aristocracy—in almost all lands of Europe the oldest families have German names—they brought with them a new political system, the feudal system, and on the remnants of the old empire of the Romans arose the feudal states of Europe. Secondly, the old empire as well as the new kingdoms was permeated and deeply influenced by the Christian religion, which changed the inward life of men and things as thoroughly as the German conquest changed their outward state. At the same time the new religion, born on oriental soil and founded on oriental ideas, underwent in its turn a thorough transformation when planted in the soil of a new race.

And in the midst of all these tremendous revolutions,

which changed the face of the earth, the remnants of the old empire, the remnants of antique civilisation and of the Latin race continued to exist, and never ceased to have a powerful influence on the minds and customs of men.

But weightier almost in its consequences than the fact itself was the form in which the diffusion of the Germans took place. From the middle of the fourth until the eighth century the empire was exposed to an unceasing stream of German invasions, and each of them brought fire and devastation and horrible cruelty into the invaded country. These wild warriors, to whom "death on the straw" seemed the most shameful end for a man, who, if they could not fall in battle, cut "runes" into their own neck and breast, and expired singing songs of joy and triumph, while their blood streamed down their bodies, were, of course, wholly insensible to the pains of others. The Franks especially were cruel and brutal to a degree which is impossible to describe. More terrible yet were the Huns, whom the Germans themselves believed to be children of evil spirits and unclean women. These centuries, which for the middle and the north of Europe were the fermentation and first dawn of a new era, were for the populations of the civilised old countries a prolonged death-torment. There had been misery enough in the social state of the empire, everywhere the people were impoverished, the extortion of taxes had to be performed by ever more cunning methods, want and famine were such, that in most provinces it was a common thing to expose a great number of the new-born children. Now the misery was enhanced by direct physical torture at the hands of savages, acute suffering aggravating the chronic pain; and the continual devastation, the murderous wars,

the custom of torturing prisoners, which, in spite of the opposition of Christian teachers, continued until the latest times of the Middle Ages—in the east of Europe even until the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries—all this had the effect that never and nowhere was suicide so frequent as in the decaying Roman Empire. All the letters of the Fathers of the Church, all the histories of the time are full of misery. Woefully characteristic is the expression of a bishop in Gaul, who tells how the citizens of the towns still continued to amuse themselves and laugh and applaud in the circus and in the theatres, and who writes: "It is as if the Roman people had eaten the herbs of Sardinia, and were forced to break out into a disease of laughter—'moritur et ridet!' It laughs and dies."

We need only consider how much culture was destroyed and lost; we need but recall to our mind the magnificence of Imperial Rome, the city which contained more public works of art than all great capitals of the world together contain to-day, and in which there stood two thousand palaces and four thousand monuments of great Romans alone, and compare it with the heap of ruins which was left of it in the Middle Ages. At the time of Trajan, Rome had a million and a half of inhabitants, in the fifth century half a million, after the Gothic wars five thousand —and as if history wanted to point at the dreary chasm which separated the new time of Italy from the old—in the year 546, when Totila, the King of the Goths, left it, Rome stood for forty days perfectly deserted and void!

The Germans had hardly begun to settle when Mohammedanism began to spread, and the inroads of the Saracens destroyed what had scarce begun to recover. Italy was more exposed to them than any other country. In the year 846, at the time of Pope Sergius II., they sacked the

treasures of St. Peter and Paul. To this day may be seen in Italy, especially in the south, the remnants of the castles and watch-towers which were erected against them everywhere along the coast.

From the north the Norman pirates rushed in, on the Seine they went up as far as Paris, their Viking-ships sailed through the Straits of Gibraltar and plundered the Italian shore. From the east the Magyars rode far into France and Upper Italy. At first the peoples had nothing to oppose to them but despair; even the Germans seemed to have lost their warlike spirit; "coupled together like beasts," the chronicler tells, "those who were not killed were driven away." Thus the devastation went on unceasingly from the end of the third to the middle of the tenth century. Who may count the number of burned cities, of destroyed convents and libraries? Only this destruction of seven hundred years can explain the utter savageness of the Middle Ages on the very soil of antique glory.

We need but think of what had existed before and what remained. Of all the rich Greek literature almost nothing was left. Of the hundred dramas of Sophocles, but seven have come down to our time; of the seventy tragedies of Aeschylos we have also but seven; of the lyric poets we have but poor fragments, single verses, almost no whole poem. Of the numberless great philosophers, the works of two only have been preserved in a more or less complete state; of the immense scientific literature, almost nothing has reached us; of the many historians, perhaps half a dozen; of Greek painting, almost nothing; of architecture and sculpture, the poor shattered remnants which still are the chief glory of our galleries. And yet these remnants, these hints of what had been,

regenerated Europe in the fourteenth century, give us half of our culture to-day; thousands of people in every country not only owe to them the best part of their education, but earn their living by studying them and imparting their knowledge to others. We may gather from the vital force of these remnants how abundant and glorious must have been the full treasures of antiquity. One may well shudder at the thought of such an immense destruction, and understand that there are people who tremble for our own civilisation, and who say: "Nothing is so swift as decay."

Let us once more glance backwards at Imperial Rome. Statistical tables of the fourth and fifth centuries tell us that in Rome were 423 temples, 154 images of the gods, made of gold and ivory, 2 colossal statues, 22 great equestrian statues, 3785 monuments of emperors and great Romans, 1352 fountains and basins, all works of art; of theatres, the largest had 22,888 seats, while the Circus Maximus had 385,000 seats. It may give some idea of these dimensions to the reader when I say, that in this circus the whole population of Bristol could sit to the last infant, and then there would be still room for free entry for all the inhabitants of Great Yarmouth! We can but dimly conceive what an immense quantity of works of art the 2000 palaces of Rome contained. But one point is essential; in ancient Rome there were 867 public bath-houses — Modern Vienna, the capital of Austria, has but 57. If the use of soap and water is a sign of civilisation, how far beneath the old Romans are we Europeans of to-day!

In the time when those tables were drawn up, all this was but the fossilised and dilapidated integument of the antique life of yore; but one or two centuries earlier the

pulse of life which had created all this was still beating, and all the shores of the Mediterranean Sea, Italy, Spain, Greece, Gaul, Asia Minor, Egypt, and Syria, all the empire from Portugal to the Black Sea, were covered with gleaming white cities, which, if not equal to Rome, still were all resplendent of antique art, cities some of which had half a million of inhabitants, trade and manufacture flourishing in all, art and science cultivated everywhere, with numerous universities, and houses full of comfort and adorned by an art which ours, in spite of all our improvement in appliances, has not surpassed.

Of course much could be said against that culture, much could be said of its inward rottenness and decay—of its being founded on slavery and cruel exploitation—but here I speak of what was performed.

And now let us turn our eyes to a mediæval city. We must not think of its picturesque aspect. Disorder often looks more picturesque than order, and, compared with the bad taste of our present architecture, mediæval buildings may be regarded as a romantic ideal. But if we speak of the state of life and civilisation in those cities, we can but consider the contrast to the antique time when they knew how to unite beauty with perfect usefulness. The first thing which would strike us would be the incredible dirt. "Le moyen âge," Taine says, "a vécu sur un fumier."* No pavement, deepest mire, no sewage, all filth thrown into the streets—the consequence was an incessant stench pervading all things. The windows were small and few as possible, the rooms dark, the floors covered mostly with straw, the furniture scanty and badly

* That is a peculiarity on which the tales of chivalry do not like to dwell. Nobody can get a true notion of those times out of novels like those of Walter Scott—they are all painted theatre costumes. The

shaped. Add to this the ugly attire which resembled sacks, the dirtiness of the inhabitants themselves, and more than this, their brutality and ignorance, and the perfect inability to imitate any natural form. The existing remnants of art of the first centuries of our era are clumsier and more unnatural than the stiff forms of Egyptian or Assyrian art. The limitless deterioration is plainly visible.

Slaughter and devastation had swept away the ancient civilisation, and men began with toil and pain to render our planet again habitable.

dirtiness of those proud knights would be unbearable to us. Ivanhoe, Marmion, Douglas, and Graeme all objected to washing. There is a Spanish love-song, in which the knight sings:

> You are more white, my mistress,
> Than the purest ray of sun,
> But seven years have passed, yea seven,
> Since I last put down my arms,
> My body's become blacker
> Than the blackest coal.

As late as the sixteenth century Queen Marguerite of Navarre, the celebrated story-teller, showed her hands in the Tuileries, to prove how beautiful they were, and added proudly, "Bien que je ne les aie décrassées depuis huit jours."

CHAPTER II

THE NEW MORAL IDEAL

These are the results of the great and terrible movement in outward life. The inner life of mediæval men was dominated and impregnated by the Christian religion, whose effects on the culture of the epoch were more important than that of any other influence. In religious times and books the rise of Christendom, its appearance in the world, is defined as the central event in the history of civilisation. But while it is clear that an orthodox person must see the culminating-point of history, as regards religion, in the appearance and the spreading of the true faith, the historian's task is to investigate impartially the effects which this great event had on the life and customs of men. Religious people will see simply an immense advance from antiquity. This opinion, of course, was the ruling one in the Middle Ages. Virgil, the representative of antique wisdom, can lead Dante only through two realms; the third and highest, that of Heaven, is closed to him. The men of antiquity were all lost and doomed to Hell, the men of the new era were Christians, that is to say, redeemed. The opinion of Abelard, who asserted that virtuous heathens, and especially a great number of philosophers, were admitted to eternal bliss, found no followers. There was but one man of antique

times who was saved—the Emperor Trajan, who, so the legend tells, was freed from the fire of Hell not through his own merit, but by the prayer of Pope Gregory the Great.* In the times of enlightenment, in times of

* Dante, therefore, finds him in the sixth heaven among the virtuous rulers, and the celestial Eagle explains this fact as follows :

The first life and the fifth, that have their home
Within my brow, amaze thee, in that they
Adorn the regions where the angels roam ;

Not as thou deemst they left their mortal clay,
Heathens, but Christians, strong in faith to see,
Or the pierc'd feet, or else the pierc'd feet's day
Beheld far off ; for one from Hell, where free
Path to good-will is none, with flesh was clad,
That so of lively hope reward might be ;

Of lively hope, which put forth prayer that had
Power to obtain that God his soul would raise,
So that his will might turn to good from bad.

The glorious soul of whom I tell the praise,
Returning to his flesh for briefest hour,
Believed in him who could direct his ways,

And so believing, glowed with fiery power
Of love so true, that when he died once more
He was thought worthy of this blissful bower.

Thomas Aquinas says : "As to the case of Trajan, one may accept the supposition that he was recalled to life by the prayers of St. Gregory and thus attained grace, through which he gained the remission of his sins and in consequence the freedom from punishment . . . yet others would rather say that the soul of Trajan was not simply absolved from the guilt which must be followed by eternal punishment, but that his punishment was only temporarily suspended, that is, until the Judgment Day."

The other person of whom Dante speaks in those verses is the Trajan Rhipeus ; but he was one of the "pre-Christians." Thomas Aquinas explains this as follows : "To many heathens a revelation of Christ was given, and if some were saved to whom the revelation had not been given, yet those were not saved without belief in the Divine Mediator, for if they had not an explicit belief they had an indefinite implicit

materialism, the civilising effects of Christendom have been as unjustly underrated. The same may be said of some enthusiastic admirers of the Ideals of the Renaissance from Beccadelli to Friedrich Nietzsche.

The expansion of Christendom continued from the first century of its existence throughout the whole Middle Ages. But, if we limit ourselves to the territory of antique Paganism, we may roughly assign A.D. 529 as the turning-point. In that year the last temple of Apollo in Italy was destroyed by St. Benedict, and the last seven masters of antique philosophy in Athens were expelled by the Emperor Justinian and fled to the Persian king Chosru. These two signal events may induce us to choose that year as the point at which the conquest of the ancient empire was completed and Paganism finally abolished.

With the Christian religion new moral opinions began to prevail, which were wholly different from the ancient, as much from those of the civilised Greeks and Romans, as from those of the wild German and Celtic tribes, and which would alone have been sufficient to effect a thorough change in the state of European civilisation. Life and the world were considered in a new light. Life, for the confessors of the new creed, had a new purpose and a new meaning. Their morals, their virtues, their crimes, their duties, their relations to God and man, their ideals as well as their customs, were different.

Now it is clear that men, who condemn deeds which are considered heroic and praiseworthy by others, who belief in Divine providence; by believing that God was the Saviour of men, and would save them by ways which would best please Him, and according to what the Spirit had revealed to some who could see the truth."

sanction a conduct as heavenly which by others is considered weak and abject, who hold things forbidden which by others are believed to be just and lawful, who follow aims which to others appear ridiculous, must needs lead essentially different lives. Nobody, therefore, exercises such powerful influence on men as he who is able to change their opinion as to their task and aim in life and the worth of their established institutions.

The two social principles of Christendom, the doctrine of love, of unconditional universal love, and the doctrine of equality, did more, perhaps, for the moral development of mankind, and produced more noble and gentle deeds, than any other element in human history. We generally forget the hard and frightful cruelty of the ancient races when we admire the splendour of their feats and accomplishments. The Christian doctrine of equality was not based on political democratic reasons, but on the dogma that there exists an immortal soul in every man, be he nobleman or slave, and that this soul was to be saved, and could be well-pleasing to a Lord before whose eternal glory every earthly difference of rank and birth must vanish, before whose throne the slave could be welcomed and the Senator and Consul hurled into darkness. The soul made the Roman patrician equal to the negro slave, a notion which would have seemed absurd to a true Roman. While it must be conceded that these two doctrines may exist and prevail independently of Christian religion, it remains true, nevertheless, that Christianity did most to propagate them and give them the power which they obtained in modern democracy.

It is true that these principles, that of love as well as that of equality, were continually disregarded and violated in the Middle Ages, and not the least by the Church

herself; but then the explanation of this lies in the fact that the wild and brutal men of those times were wholly incapable of fully understanding these doctrines, and much less of practising them in earnest. A second reason is obvious. As long as Christians were a little persecuted sect, only the purest and holiest belief could move men to accept baptism and to fulfil all the difficult duties, to run all the dangers, which they well knew to be the consequence. But when the doctrine of Christ became the accepted religion of the Empire and of the Court, when it no longer brought dangers but preferments and dignities, when it became the first step the ambitious had to take, when the whole crowd of indifferent and low-minded people became Christians—how could the purity of the early times be preserved? How could it be attained when the wild German warriors, in whose souls the ferocious warlike spirit of the race fought fiercely with the new doctrine, accepted it? Their whole life became a continual convulsion, a constant wavering now to this side, now to the other, and of the same men the most frightful cruelties are reported, as well as moments of devoted ardour and meekest humility.

There is no more expressive episode in mediæval history, none that could be more characteristic of those wild Christian warriors than that, after the capture of Jerusalem, they killed every living person there, men, women, and children, and then, literally covered with blood, prostrated themselves at the Saviour's Tomb and kissed it with glowing religious ardour and devout humility! But this savagery lay in the character of the race, not in their religion. As late as the sixteenth century it was the baptismal custom in Ireland to immerse new-born children entirely in water, leaving only the right arm out,

that it might remain pagan and able to deal blows unfettered by Christianity.

On the other hand, the most uncompromising of the Christians, Tertullian, the Montanists and other sects, carried their principles to the logical conclusion, and utterly condemned warfare and fighting, which was but consistent.

And, finally, as the rich young man in the Gospel found the words of Christ too hard to follow, so men always found them: Church and State contented themselves, then as well as now, with the forms, which are so much easier to adopt and to show than the spirit.

This was one side of the new religion. Another was the total change in moral ideals. The moral ideals of the ancients were: personal greatness, dignity, self-confidence, magnanimity, invincible firmness in every act. The Christians praised the very contrary: humility, obedience, self-sacrifice. Of course there were but few persons who really practised these virtues, distasteful as they were to the character of the race, but there were others who exaggerated and distorted them to an unnatural degree.

Antiquity saw everything in this present life, found all its ideals in beauty and sublimity on earth; it praised pleasure, as long as it was not immoderate, all its culture was joyful and sensual, therefore it was artistic in an eminent degree. I do not speak now of all the frightful degeneration. There can be no doubt about the corruption of the latter times of antiquity and about the necessity of a moral reorganisation. Here I only speak of its performance and of its ideal. Ancient teachers praised a joyful and creative life—active life was their field—the shadowy life which was to come after it was an eternity of regret and sorrow. The new doctrine, on the contrary,

saw in the life on earth only a short and passing state of preparation for the future life, which was to be the essential part of existence, and it exhorted all men to resign themselves and to turn from life. The world was a vale of tears, life a dreary waste of misery and heavy trials. The frightful state of the world did much to develop such views; the earth in those centuries was indeed a vale of tears, and as soon as the condition of men grew more pleasant, as soon as men could again begin to enjoy their existence, those ideas lost their power.

Such views were corroborated by the doctrine of original sin. This gloomy conception of humanity, foreign to the European genius and bearing the mark of its oriental birth, was developed chiefly by Augustine and weighed heavily on the souls of men. It caused men to regard nature and the human body as things unclean in themselves and sinful by their very existence; it gave a new tendency to morals, new restraints to human life, and, exaggerated and distorted by fanatic monks, it produced a series of strange moral phenomena, and led, particularly in the field of sexual life, to consequences which were hardly less pernicious and immoral than the licence of decaying antiquity.

Men in those times led lives of trembling anxiety, now carried away by powerful passions into horrible crime, and again tortured by fearful pangs of remorse. Earthly life being so thoroughly sinful and the continual danger of losing the eternal so imminent, it necessarily seemed best to dedicate it wholly to penitence; for even those who should attain the impossible and be perfectly virtuous, even they had gained but little, for they had enough to bear in their inheritance of original sin. This led to the

institution of monasteries and of hermit life. Men broke and abjured all human ties, castigated themselves in the most unnatural way, now seeing in feverish dreams a wonderful paradise, now persecuted by horrible temptations, the outbursts of a tortured fancy. We know of saints and hermits who forbade their parents to see them and remained deaf to all prayers, who caused their own children to be tortured before their very eyes in order to render themselves insensible to earthly sentiments, who neither washed nor combed themselves, nor changed their clothes, but remained motionless all their lives in a rapturous trance. Though not all the world participated in such madness, yet all the world recognised in it the ideal life. Procreation and the continuance of mankind, nay, its very existence, was in itself a sin.

To make life appear as odious as possible, the greatest stress was laid on the dark, the sordid, the painful and unclean sides of life. Innumerable works of the earliest and of the latest parts of the Middle Ages were conceived to enforce the miseries and impurities of human life; the poor remnants of art were dedicated to the same object.*

* A characteristic and much read work of the twelfth century was the treatise of Cardinal Lothar (afterwards Pope Innocent VII. of the family which later on was called de' Conti), *De contemptu mundi sive de miseria humanæ conditionis* ("Of the Contempt of the World and the Miseries of the Human State"), which was soon translated into Italian by Bono Giamboni. It contains sentences like the following: "Man is composed of dirt and the most vulgar nutriments, while other things are made out of much nobler nutriments, for the Sage says that the stars and the planets are made of fire, spirits and winds of air, fishes nd birds of water. . . . The trees produce leaves, blossoms and fruits out of themselves, men vermin and lice; the former produce wine and oil and balms, the latter excrements. The former produce sweetest odours, the latter abominable stench. . . . If thou wilt well think on it, woman conceives her son in the heat of lust, gives him birth in pain and sorrow, nourishes him with fear and toil, and watches him with

To make sin more horrible the fancy of men tormented itself with the invention and contemplation of ever more minute descriptions of Hell and Purgatory; every second of man's life was of anxious importance, for the smallest sin, if it was not repented and remitted during this life, was sure to draw after it, at the very least, long protracted pain in the life beyond; and as in Egypt of old, human life became dark and joyless. And as often as Nature, like a dammed-up stream, rose and overflowed its limits, lust and passion became the more savage and furious.

Another new and unhappy feature, which had been unknown in European history before the Middle Ages and the expansion of Christendom, were the religious wars. Paganism was tolerant, every man was allowed to worship the gods he chose. The persecution of Christians in the Roman Empire was not founded on religious motives but on purely political reasons, Christians being thought a subversive sect and hostile to the State. Among the common people especially it was generally believed that in their secret religious assemblies the Christians killed little pagan children, a belief which seems to recur in every time and in every place, wherever strange and mysterious little sects live separated and yet intermixed with the people; the same superstition is found to this day in China, where the people believe that the Christians kill Chinese children, their eyes being needed for some religious ceremony; and in Europe, where Christians in their turn believe in similar horrors concerning Jewish rites. But, apart from political reasons, or when not

care and anxiety, and all this is just from natural impulse. . . . The new-born boy says 'A,' the woman 'E,' which are both the sounds of woe and pain, as many as there are born of Eve's race."

stimulated by such odious and exciting rumours, all occidental religions were rather tolerant, while all religions of oriental origin, the Jewish, the Christian, the Moslem faith, are intolerant. Persecution, however, had not its origin in the spirit of Christianity, but in the fanatic zeal and orthodox rage of those who confessed it; and mad quarrels about the most insignificant shades of dogmatic differences cost the lives of millions of men.

This rage manifested itself from the very beginning. The Arians once killed 3000 Catholics in a riot in Constantinople; one Arian bishop in Alexandria ordered all Catholics there to be scourged or roasted alive; wherever the Catholics came into power they did the same with the Arians.

By oppressed Christian sects the Vandals were called into Africa and the Mohammedans into Egypt. And this madness never ceased until recent times. In the sixteenth century more people were killed from religious motives in the Netherlands alone, and in the space of but twelve years—Christians by Christians—than in all the persecutions of Christians in the whole immense Roman Empire during four hundred years. The dissenter was a demon, doomed to Hell, an abomination to God; and men blasphemously fancied that their murderous cruelty was shared by God! One of the most influential ecclesiastic authors, Peter Lombard, wrote the monstrous sentence that the joys of the blessed would be enhanced after the Judgment by the aspect of the damned in their pain.

Thus the salvation of the soul, first by true faith, and secondly by pious deeds—both were soon separated in theory as well as in practice—became the first object and aim of every mediæval man. Every believer—they formed the immense majority—did in his own way what

he could. Some devoted their whole lives to contemplation and preparation for the life beyond; those who did not go so far did their best by prayers and works of repentance. The penitent monk and penitent pilgrim were characteristic phenomena of the Middle Ages: they were to be seen wandering on all public roads, kneeling in every church, often dragging heavy chains or iron rings after them or wound around their bodies.

Religious vows of all kind played an important part in every man's life. The prince promised a crusade for a victory over his enemies, the nobleman a chapel for a vengeance or for a recovery from illness, the serf a candle or a hundred prayers for finding a missing sheep, or for keeping his damaged plough serviceable until night. A vast number of persons, men as well as women, took the vows, sometimes near the end of their lives, sometimes on their very death-beds, so that they might die monks or nuns.

This whole life, devoted on principle to supersensual things, was organised in the visible Church. A vast and powerful hierarchy controlled the community of believers. The Oriental Christian Church became organised according to the imperial system of the Romans; and its organisation was so splendidly framed, spiritual and temporal links were so admirably interwoven in powerful chains, the whole system was founded on so cunning an application of all psychologic means, that it has survived every attack from without and all decay within, and has held its position, if not victoriously, yet unconquered, to the present day.

Oriental ecstasy found, while keeping unimpaired its mystic symbols, a perfect expression in the beautiful Catholic ritual, always so impressive to the senses and

minds of the people ; and as the oyster secretes its beautiful pearl and surrounds itself with the protective shells, so the whole religious movement surrounded itself with a very rational hierarchical system for the preservation and protection of faith as well as of the many material interests of the Church. The whole organisation found its central unity in the Vicar of Christ, the Bishop of Rome.

This development and this concentration form a great and interesting phenomenon in history. It was made possible by a great number of co-operating causes, by the splendour of power which hovered over old Imperial Rome, to which long after its decay the sonorous verse bore witness :

Roma caput mundi regit orbis frena rotundi ;

then by the necessity of a uniform organisation for the double purpose of expanding the domain of belief and of retaining the newly converted, a necessity which was provided for with subtlest intelligence, and last not least by the personal efforts of great Popes, by the deeds of those who were noble and great as well as by the energetic, clear and foreseeing policy of others.

Thus the Catholic religion ruled Christian Europe from Rome as its centre.

CHAPTER III

THE POLITICAL IDEAL

Thus a complete change in the social and political state in the ruling races, in religion, in morals, in culture, separates mediæval men from those of antiquity. But however great the contrast may be in reality, reality itself is but one half of our life; the other half consists in our conceptions. Our conceptions of reality, the more or less distorted reflections, which all events leave in men's brains, always influence the actions of men, and therewith the events themselves. What a man believes himself to be, even if perfectly false, has as much influence on his doings as what he is in fact, for his belief is but a part of himself, contradictory as it may appear. This is the reason why ideas, even the merest illusion, nay, unmitigated stupidity itself, are facts and powers in history.

The illusion of mediæval men was, that they believed themselves living in antiquity—that they had but a slight idea of the gulf that yawned between them and the previous era, but believed their own times to be in every respect the continuation and even the perfection, the crowning fulfilment of antiquity. The crowning fulfilment—for had they not the true faith, which the old Greeks and Romans had never known?

The German tribes which destroyed the Roman Empire

did this, as it were, unintentionally. They invaded it because they wanted to conquer territory, and desired booty, glory and power. But the empire itself, with its organisation, its vast extension, the dazzling splendour of its magnificent culture and its immense riches, was regarded by them with reverential awe, they wanted but to participate in it. The weakest emperors were surrounded by a halo of gold and purple, of pomp and power, and when the barbarians accepted Christianity, an important reason of this conversion was its being the emperor's religion. Even after the division of the empire, after the downfall of the Western throne when first the Goths and then the Lombards ruled in Italy, the new masters were regarded as usurpers, not only by the old Italian population, but the German princes themselves, who had conquered and in fact governed Italy, were at heart of the same opinion. None of them dared to call himself Emperor, not even King of Italy—they styled themselves Kings of the Goths, Kings of the Lombards. A shadow of imperial sovereignty seemed to hover above their thrones. Parts of Italy, Ravenna, the so-called dukedom of Rome, and large territories in the south, were for a long time directly subject to the Greek emperor, and governed by him through the Exarch of Ravenna. Numerous traces of the Greek language may be found in modern Italian. As late as in the year 663, the Emperor Constans II. visited Rome on a survey of his empire ; he was the last Greek emperor who personally entered Rome, but for a long time the Popes continued to be confirmed by the Exarchs. In 772, a Bull of Hadrian I., he who called Charlemagne to Italy, begins with the words : *Imperante domino nostro, piissimo Augusto Constantino a Deo coronato magno imperatore . . .* ("During the reign of our Sovereign, the most pious and

august Constantinus, our great Emperor, crowned by God . . .”). Had those emperors, their rightful sovereigns, the direct successors of the Roman Cæsars, been able to assist them against the Lombards, the Popes would never have called the Franks into Italy.

But Charlemagne had other views and intentions in coming to Italy than the former German kings. He put an end to the uncertain conditions on Italian ground, entirely disregarding the problematic claims of Eastern emperors on the Western throne. But when, in the year 800, he ordered Pope Leo to crown him as Roman emperor, even he was fully persuaded that he had but put an end to an interregnum, that he had seized the same crown which Romulus Augustulus in the year 475 had laid down at the feet of Odovakar, and that he therewith had become the direct successor of Cæsar Octavianus Augustus, the first of the emperors.

This legitimistic dream existed throughout the Middle Ages and had incalculable consequences. It gave birth to the notion that the imperial dignity meant primarily the sovereignty over the Roman people, and that only in Rome could it be bestowed and received.

Rome, however, became more and more identified, especially in the eyes of foreigners, with the papal throne. Such a state of things had never been intended by Charlemagne. Devout as he was, he always considered himself as the Pope's and the Roman people's sovereign just as the Byzantine emperor before him; as all Christian emperors had been, who would have laughed at the idea of deriving their imperial power from the Pope. Charles had acted as judge in the Pope's cause, and received his expurgatory oath, even before the ceremony of coronation had been performed.

He acknowledged his father Pipin's donations of certain territories and their revenues, but he never intended conceding the power of independent government to the Pope. He had allowed the Pope to crown him in order to add solemnity to the act; but, in order to bar any prescriptive right, he would not permit his son and successor, Louis the Pious, to take the crown at Rome, nor from the Pope, but crowned him with his own hands in the year 818, at the Diet of Aachen, as Emperor of the Romans. He, the emperor himself, nominated the emperor—a great and far-seeing man in whatever he undertook.

Charlemagne's successors, however, were weaklings, while the Popes, especially Leo IV., the son of Radoald, and Nicholas I., the son of Theodore, were powerful personalities and bold politicians. They won precedence over the weak and discordant Carolingian princes, the spiritual halo which surrounded their ever-growing power making victory easier for them.

The most important effect was, that the empire was named and thought to be that of the Romans, and not a new empire of Germans, as it was in reality. Words and traditions had a much greater power on mediæval men than on us, and the word "empire" seemed intrinsically connected with Imperial Rome; hence it was universally believed that the elected German king could not lawfully become emperor except in Rome, an illusion which cost the German people oceans of blood.

A second and later consequence of this imagined continuity was the acceptance of Roman law. In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, when Roman law again began to be universally studied, and the emperors learned that it had been the law of the old empire, they naturally thought themselves bound to accept it as the law of their pre-

decessors, fully persuaded as they were that their new empire was identical with the old. Nobody even thought of questioning whether it was suited to the new state of things.

It was the law of an autocratic empire, while the new empire was a feudal state; it had been made for a country with highly developed civilisation, industry, commerce and finance; ill suited for countries whose economy was founded on primitive agricultural institutions. Besides, it expressed the views and sentiments of a different race, its precepts were strange and incomprehensible to the people. But in the Middle Ages no one ever inquired into the nature of a thing; words and forms alone were considered, and always were decisive.

A third consequence was that Latin became the official language of the empire, and thus gained that immense influence which it preserved throughout the whole period, and which makes itself felt even by us. Thus men received a language which was universal, and by means of which scholars and statesmen of all lands could communicate with each other; the barbarians found a highly developed idiom capable of expressing thoughts, for which their mother-tongue was not mature. Moreover, they received the key to the treasures of ancient literature. On the other hand, the supremacy of the Latin speech considerably retarded the development of the national languages and of popular instruction, it widened the gulf between the cultured and the illiterate classes. Culture was confined to an unfamiliar medium; the very language of civilisation and science, being other than that of daily life, estranged them from life and nature.

Thus antiquity, or let us rather say what people knew of antiquity, or what they deemed it to be, became the

universal basis on which they believed everything must needs be founded—the remnants of antique literature were clad with an authority which forbade doubt and criticism.

The same authority made itself felt in many other fields, and even in the affairs of everyday life. It was from antiquity that men wanted to derive their descent and the rights they valued most. There was no noble Italian family but traced its descent from some old Roman, no town which did not claim to have been founded by fugitive Trojans. This ambition was not confined to Italy. The monk Otfried, of Weissenburg, in his "Harmony of the Gospels," says that the Franks are descended from the Macedonians. The Roman nobles called themselves Consuls, and later on Senators or Proconsuls. In the same measure as knowledge increased and the movement which is now called the Renaissance advanced, the antique ideal grew stronger, until in Cola Rienzi, "the Last of the Tribunes," who summoned all princes and cities of the world to the tribunal of the sovereign Roman people, the political delusion reached its culmination and exploded like a bubble. The astonishment and the mockery of the summoned made the change manifest to all the world, and made men conscious of the real state of things, to which they had been blind for so many centuries. But not until true antiquity was again discovered and understood did men fully perceive how remote they already were from it.

Mediæval society thought that it was the unbroken continuance of the antique. Historical knowledge being deficient, people fancied that the social state and civilisation of the ancients had been just the same state of feudalism and chivalry as their own was. In the numerous mediæval

tales of Troy and of Alexander the Great we always find the same feudal surroundings and chivalrous manners and customs. Antiquity had been the preparation of the great Christian empire which was ruled by the Emperor and by the Pope, and there was no historical event in ancient times that was not regarded as a preparatory step of Divine providence for those institutions.

In the second canto of the "Divine Comedy," Dante thinks himself unworthy of visiting the realms of the dead, which nobody had visited before him except St. Paul and Æneas, whose descent had been told by Virgil. That the Apostle, "the vessel of election," was worthy of such a vision is obvious, that Æneas could be admitted is explained by Dante in his mission :

> For he of our dear Rome and its great might
> Was chosen sire in heaven empyreal,
> But this and that, to speak truth definite,
> Were fixed and 'stablished for the Holy See
> Where the great Peter's Vicar sits of right;
> He, in that journey, where he won from thee
> His glory, heard of things from whence did flow
> The Papal mantle and his victory.
>
> (PLUMPTRE.)

In the same way, Dante, in his political treatise "On Monarchy," derives the imperial power from the Romans, who in their turn had been predestined and empowered by Divine providence to conquer and rule the world. Hence it follows—such is Dante's argument in this Ghibelline pamphlet—that the emperor's rights are derived directly from God and not from the Pope.

It was the highest political ideal of the Middle Ages that Pope and Emperor—the two swords, or the two lights of the world, as they were called—should govern it

in peace with each other, one caring for its spiritual the other for its temporal welfare. Absolute theocracy in all spiritual, absolute monarchy in all temporal questions; this was the political ideal, especially that of Dante. The real state of things and their development of course never corresponded to this ideal. Essays were made towards its realisation by a few powerful persons, both from the papal and from the imperial throne. But the very institutions of feudalism, the troubled state of the empire, the division of the land into innumerable greater or smaller estates, rendered the absolute power of the Emperor ineffective. Then the bearers of the two supreme powers were but men, exposed to human weakness and blinded by ambition; they quarrelled, and instead of being allies, became rivals.

The impossibility of delineating a sure limit between their mutual competences, the undying question as to what belonged to the purely spiritual sphere and what was purely temporal, the necessary mingling of both in real life, the innumerable conflicts of interest, occasioned unceasing complaints of both parties against encroachments from the other side, and originated that great strife between the two powers which, drawing almost every question of political and intellectual life into its vortex, went on for centuries and has not quite subsided in our days. We should be thankful for it. Had it been possible for the two powers to unite, or had one succeeded in making the other completely subservient to its aims, the consequence would certainly not have been the realisation of Dante's ideal—an empire flourishing in eternal peace—but a uniform Chinese despotism, by which all freedom and all development had been made impossible.

CHAPTER IV

THE COMBAT BETWEEN CHURCH AND STATE

The ambition of the spiritual lords, who desired to extend their control over temporal matters also, pretending that their power as the spiritual was the higher, gave the first impulse to discord. As was said above, during the reign of the last Carolingian princes, the rights of the Emperor diminished while the authority of the Pope increased. By the ninth century the papal throne had become a ruling power in Europe, and has remained so ever since, at least in principle, even during the period of its deepest decay in the tenth century; for as soon as the state of the Church was bettered and purified through the great reforming movement, the Popes instantly renewed their former claims, and as the nations grew more and more religious, succeeded in enforcing them. In the eighth and ninth centuries the great forgeries of the so-called Donation of Constantine (a pure invention and a falsification throughout), on which the temporal dominion of the Popes is essentially based, were first perpetrated. In the ninth the Donations of the Kings Pipin and Lewis were forged. Although founded on fact, they were completely false so far as the pretended documents showed larger territories and far more comprehensive rights than had ever been conferred by the originals. But still more

important were the false decretals of the so-called pseudo-Isidorus. In the place of the collection of genuine decretals—that is, papal decrees—which had been made by Bishop Isidorus of Seville, Churchmen began, in the latter half of the ninth century, to use a forged collection ascribed to the same Isidorus, but which probably originated in the north-east of France. It contained a large number of letters of former Popes, almost all forgeries, in which the supremacy of the Bishop of Rome over all bishops and archbishops of the world, and his spiritual control of all laymen, was asserted in much stronger terms than hitherto. At the same time, all clergymen were rendered almost totally exempt from civil justice and the authority of civil magistrates. The tendency of the falsification was to elevate and to centralise the power of the Church and to transform it into a monarchic institution. Parchments and writs had a far higher authority in those times than they have now; critical inquiry being unknown—for, indeed, hardly any one except the clergy had learning enough to read these documents—the possibility of falsification never was so much as suspected, and those decretals soon became established law.

If, however, we look at the whole transaction from a purely historical, and not from a moral point of view, we may say that those letters, though forged and attributed to Popes, who could never have thought of such a power being given to them, were nevertheless the adequate expression of public opinion, and of the claims of the Roman Church, as justified by the spirit of the times. In those letters the Church gave itself a legal basis on which it could found its dominion. It does not seem to make a great difference whether they were "decreed" in Rome or forged in Rheims, because the fact remains that in

them the real state of Church power found a codification.

The mutual position of the Pope and Emperor underwent a complete change. In the year 777 the Romans had sworn the oath of fealty to Charlemagne and the Pope had acknowledged him as his sovereign. Less than a century later Pope Nicolas I. was Sovereign Lord of Rome and the Emperor Lewis II. led his horse on foot. Another change followed, by which the Emperors recovered their original power of enthroning and deposing the Popes, but after many uncertainties and continual shifting of power now to this side and now to the other, the Popes, assisted by the ever-increasing religious movement among the peoples, were decidedly victorious; Gregory VII. was in a position to claim the papal dominion over the world.

In the tenth century the Emperors had nominated the Popes; in the course of the next the Emperor's crown, though always due to the German king, became a gift of the Pope, until Emperor Lothar seemed to settle the strife by acknowledging in a written document that he owed his imperial power to the Pope, from whom he had received it. With the rise of the Hohenstaufens the combat began anew, and lasted until both powers—that of the Pope as well as that of the empire—had bled themselves to death.

Even before the Carolingian house had become extinct they had lost their power in Italy, which fell into an anarchic state. After the deposition of Charles the Bald, princes of Lombard, Frank and Burgundian origin successively became kings of Italy, but none of them obtained a real and lasting power. In Rome there was an open and constant opposition on the part of the

Roman people to the Popes; the fierce Roman aristocracy dominated the papal see. In the course of thirty years, five out of eight Popes died violent deaths, either strangled in prison or killed by rebellious nobles; two renounced their dignities, and only one of them died a natural death. This was the time of most profound decay in the Roman Church. In the year 1046 three Popes fought for the Tiara, until Emperor Henry III. put an end to this state in the Synod of Sutri by deposing all three and enthroning a German bishop. Five German Popes now succeeded one another, all strong men and favouring reform. In the tenth century the barbarism of the people and the worldliness of the clergy had reached its height. Then began a religious reaction, originating in the monastic orders, and particularly in French cloisters, the centre of which was the newly founded monastery of Cluny. The original tendency of this movement was ascetic; an agitation against the life of worldly pleasure and fighting which most priests led, and particularly against the marriages of priests, which had become general; at the same time they enforced Church government by carrying into the hierarchy the same severe and centralistic spirit in which their convents were organised. It was not only victorious within the Church itself, but propagated by the agitation of monks and hermits; it conquered the minds of men, everywhere deepening the religious spirit and reinforcing the ideals of the Church. It led to that mysticism which played so important a part in the intellectual life of the later centuries of the Middle Ages, it decided the great combat between the Emperor and the Pope, and it had a decisive influence on the development of the Catholic Church. From France it spread over Germany and Italy, where it found a new

centre in Florence in the monastery of Vallombrosa. Monks from Cluny and their partisans soon attained the first places at the Papal Court. The earnest and erudite Germans, who, following on the dissolute Romans, now occupied the papal seat, called to their council pure and austere men whose spirit was kindred to their own. An interesting fact may be observed in the final result: the German emperors, wishing to purify the sullied Church, had nominated German Popes; these, led by the same tendency of purification and reform, selected men who soon turned the policy of the Church against the German emperors. The Popes, who had been delivered by the Emperor from the tyranny of the Roman nobles, now reclaimed their independence from the Emperor himself. Nicolas II., formerly Bishop Gerard of Florence, a Burgundian, confined the right of electing the Pope to the Cardinals alone. His second successor was Hildebrand, the son of Bonizo, a Tuscan carpenter. Bonizo and Hildebrand being both frequent Longobard names, we may assume that he, too, was of Longobard origin. He was small, of poor figure, but one of the most remarkable and strong-willed men who ever lived, not vehement, not irascible, but quiet, gentle, and of an iron firmness of purpose; "blandus ille tyrannus," "the gentle tyrant," or "the holy Satan" as he is called in the letters of his friend Pier Damiani, who often felt the irresistible power of Gregory's personality.

He was not satisfied with freedom of election, but claimed supremacy over the Emperor and the temporal sovereignty of the Church over Hungary, Bohemia, Russia, Spain, Dalmatia, Croatia, Poland, England, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, and the newly founded Norman state in the South of Italy—the latter being the only

one which the Popes afterwards succeeded in making really a fief of the Church. He proclaimed the programme of the universal dominion of the Roman Church.

In his reign the so-called War of Investitures commenced. The Pope demanded that the prelates should henceforth be elected by the clergy of their diocese alone, and confirmed by the Pope. Just as this demand seemed, and though good reasons could be alleged for it, civil authority had no choice but to oppose it.

It had been the policy of the Emperor Henry III. to employ the episcopal power against the unruly feudal princes of the empire. Bishops were selected for his counsellors and ministers, even for his generals; the bishops of the empire were given large feudal dominions; the men who were nominated to bishoprics were able politicians or staunch warriors of undoubted loyalty to the Emperor; and when the Emperor's treasury was empty, those were appointed who could pay for their offices. Such a system could not be approved by a Pope who, while he earnestly tried to raise the ecclesiastical spirit, wanted the bishops to be his political instruments against the Emperor. He demanded that only true clergymen elected by clergymen should be called to clerical offices. The Emperor alleged that he could not submit to a system by which the third part or more of the feudal estates of the empire would be bestowed and occupied by a power which was not his. He was willing to grant the freedom of election, but on the one condition that the fiefs should be returned to the empire. The bishops would not hear of this. Both parties insisting on their demands, a war of fifty years duration ensued, which caused great ruin both in Italy and in Germany, and embittered the reign of two Emperors and of six

Popes. The last but one of the Popes, Paschal II., a mild-tempered old man, thought it but just for the clergy, resolved as they were to be merely clerical henceforth, to give up the estates; but the whole clergy immediately rose against him in uproar, and a General Council refused to ratify the treatise.

The strife was an unequal one, and its conduct was terrible and confusing to the minds of men. The Pope released laymen from their duty of obedience to simoniacal bishops and vassals from allegiance to their lords. All human relations between men and all moral sentiments were thus confused and disturbed. The son rose against his father, the Church became divided within itself, for in Germany and in Lombardy the bishops of the old school fought on the Emperor's side. But the final victory of the Church could not be doubted. "The resources of the German monarch," says Lamprecht, "were of an external and merely political nature, unable to cope with the power which the ideas of reform had over the souls of men."

The persons who played prominent parts in this strife are well known. The dissolute and unhappy old Emperor Henry IV., the hero of a hundred battles, who for three days stood a penitent in the snow before the castle of Canossa—he, too, was a man of high gifts and stubborn force, but dissipated and unsteady, no match for a man like Pope Gregory VII. At Canossa the Pope took the Host with the imprecation that, if he was conscious of the slightest guilt on his part, God might strike him dead; he then offered the other half to the Emperor that he might do the same, but the Emperor did not dare. This event is highly characteristic of both adversaries and of their unequal personal force.

Another striking person was the Marchioness Matilda of Tuscany, the new Deborah, as she was called by her admirers, a proud fanatically pious woman, always ready to fight for the Church. Disappointed and unhappy in her marriage with the hunchbacked Duke Godfrey of Upper Lorraine, she devoted all the energy of her high-strung nature to the Church, and, in spite of her pride, suffered herself to be overruled by two masterful priests, Bishop Anselm of Lucca, her particular friend and spiritual director, and Gregory himself, who cleverly contrived to direct and control her, through the bishop's influence. She lived in constant emotional dependence on these two men, who exercised an almost hypnotic power over her. When suffering from illness she was cured by the bishop laying his hands on her forehead, and even after his death she would lean her head on the wooden board on which his corpse had lain, to recover from indisposition; when her eyes became inflamed, she put a ring on them which the bishop once had worn, or a piece of paper on which he had written prayers. Her case is typical, and instances of the like may be found also in modern times.*

There is a reverse side to the victory of the Pope. It was in the year 1075 that a Pope dared for the first time to command the Roman Emperor to obey him and dismiss his counsellors under penalty of excommunication; two years later the Emperor stood a penitent before the walls of Canossa. In that same year, about Christmas, the

* Some historians, hostile to the Church, have put a gross interpretation upon her relations to the bishop as well as to the Pope; see, in refutation of these, the excellent statement in Davidsohn's "Geschichte von Florenz," p. 253. The stern, warlike marchioness has been transformed by Dante into the graceful Matilda, whom he sees singing and gathering flowers in the terrestrial Paradise, preceding the procession of the triumphant Church.

same Pope Gregory VII. was attacked and beaten in the Church of St. Peter by a Roman nobleman called Cencio, and finally imprisoned in the assailant's palace. These are genuine scenes of the Middle Ages. The domestic strife between the Popes and the city of Rome runs like a caricature parallel to the world—upheaving combat between the Popes and the Emperors.

While Frederic Barbarossa humbled himself before Alexander III., and King Henry II. of England suffered the Pope to inflict penalties on him "such as to-day" (I quote from Machiavelli, and "to-day" means 1520), "a private person would be ashamed to submit to," that same Pope, "who wielded such an authority over distant princes," in spite of the humblest prayers, was unable to move the Romans to permit him to enter his town and his church. Gregory IX., the great enemy of Frederic II., was five times forced to fly from Rome, and returned thither five times, yielding to the urgent prayers of the Roman people. "But as soon as one demon was expelled from that people, seven devils possessed it again," says a biographer of this Pope. Their continual requests were money-gifts, and no Pope was able to satisfy their thirst for gold. Hardly any Pope during the whole Middle Ages could reside undisturbed in the city of Rome.

One must strive to realise mediæval Rome with its nine hundred towers, the gloomy palaces of the noblemen, the most important of which were constructed in the remnants of the mighty edifice of the past, the Colosseum, the Arches of Triumph, the castle of St. Angelo, then the narrow streets, and the narrowed but furious life which raged in them. The reader must picture to himself the unceasing family feuds between the Conti, the Frangipani, and the many other noble houses of Rome. Every

moment the feud is revived by some act of vengeance, some contested election, some piece of mockery; the streets are instantly barred by chains drawn across them, towers are constructed rapidly everywhere, in every street from all the windows and roofs the vassals shoot, the houses of the hostile family are besieged, set on fire or torn down; and constantly some quarter of the city or all its quarters are changed into the fortified camps of parties at war with one another. And as in Rome, so it was in many other towns of Italy.

Another striking feature of the times is furnished by the election of antipopes. Few Popes, indeed, in the Middle Ages had their elections left uncontested. Passionate and unruly men did not content themselves with platonic opposition, their candidate was crowned notwithstanding the majority being against him, and pope and antipope excommunicated each other and made armed war against each other, thereby perplexing still more the souls of believers.

Fulcher of Chartres, who, while taking part in the first crusade, marched through Rome with a party of the pilgrims, gives the following account in the second chapter of the first book of his history of the Kingdom of Jerusalem: "Entering the Basilica of St. Peter we found men of the foolish Pope Wibert before the altar, who, sword in hand, unlawfully possessed themselves of the pious gifts which lay on the altar. Others were seen running on the beams of the ceiling, who threw stones down upon us, while we lay prostrate praying on the floor. One tower, however, was kept by the men of Pope Urban, who loyally held it for Urban, and resisted his enemies as well as they could. Much pain did we feel, seeing such outrage, but we could do nothing except implore God to avenge it."

The War of the Investitures was ended in the year 1122 by the Concordat of Worms. It was ordained that, while the election should pertain to the clergy alone, the bestowing of fiefs should be reserved to the civil authorities; so both had to unite in advance on the candidate for every election. Though this result was most natural and simple, it would not have been possible at any earlier time, before both parties were tired of the fifty years of struggle and the interest of men in the whole question had faded. But the combat between the Emperors and the Popes, between Church and State, continued nevertheless, and raged with unbroken vehemence under the Emperors of the House of Swabia. Nor could it be otherwise. The Church claimed the temporal dominion over at least large parts of Italy, while the Emperors defended the rights of the empire. The Church fighting with spiritual weapons in the very souls of her antagonists had a double advantage, because, when victorious, her victory was certainly real; when defeated, she became a martyr in men's eyes and instantly found new enthusiastic champions. She repeatedly had her friends elected emperors, as, for example, the Guelf, Otto IV., against whom she in turn sent out Frederic II. But as soon as they had become emperors their most essential interests constrained them to oppose the Church. And the same was the case on the other side. When the Cardinal Count Sinibald Fiesco, who had always been a staunch partisan of the Emperor, was elected Pope as Innocent IV., Frederic II. said, "Now I have lost a true friend among the cardinals; no Pope can be a Ghibelline."

CHAPTER V

THE HOHENSTAUFEN

During the reign of the Swabian princes, the war which divided the world and brought interminable civil discord and ruin to Italy becomes attractive with a new and heightened interest, for the men who now begin to play prominent parts in it seem more akin to us in culture and versatility of mind, their portraits have more life and colour, they are not mere shadows and enigmas to us, as are the dim and stiff figures of former generations.

In the foreground of that historic scene the struggle and the fall of the House of Hohenstaufen appears like a grand and tremendous tragedy. The Hohenstaufens may be considered a human phenomenon. Another reigning family showing such an uninterrupted line of brilliant and gifted personalities will not easily be found in history. They did not exactly possess political talents, but they were all handsome, chivalrous, and broad-minded, possessing all the culture and freedom of thought of the period. A resplendent light of art and beauty is shed around them, almost every one of them was a renowned warrior and a minstrel too, and their glory was heightened by the tragic fate that fell to the lot of each. They were mediæval knighthood and monarchism personified. For them fought the Spirit of Chivalry and Minstrelsy, of

new-born Joy and Art, against the ascetic clerical power, and with them it was defeated. Theirs was the spirit of reawakening terrestrial life and culture.

But in the same race was embodied for the last time the ideal of the old empire; the vision of the "Roman Empire of the German Nation," as its official title was, the creation of Charlemagne; in them it strove for the last time to realise itself in all its fancied and traditionary power. Thus they became at the same time the representatives of a dying and of an arising period, uniting the aspirations of both. The empire had been founded (renewed, as people fancied) in the year 800, and after 1250 it fell. After the interregnum it was but a shadow, though it existed until 1806.

The new Dynasty of Habsburg inaugurates a new era, a new policy begins to prevail, the dawn of modern Europe seems to appear in a distance—the Middle Ages, the times of Chivalry and Romance, begin to decline. Dante, who in sorrowful verses, which form one of the most famous episodes of the "Divine Comedy" reproaches the Habsburg Emperor Albrecht that he never went to Rome, struck the keynote; though later on some of the emperors again returned to it, the march to Rome, the central and crowning enterprise of the earlier emperors, the romantic symbol of a romantic imperialism, for which the Hohenstaufens had arrayed and exhausted all the might and splendour of their knightly hosts, had lost all its importance with them. Romantic symbols began to lose their power over the fancy of men, the princes ceased to care so much for the mere form of coronation, but turned their attention to more real power.

This strong adherence to a dying institution was the ruin of the Hohenstaufens. In all intellectual matters

they were abreast of their time, nevertheless they were unable to comprehend the current of its political and social movements. They failed to see that the day of the cities and citizens was dawning and that feudalism was beginning to decline. Nowhere was this great change farther advanced than in Italy, the country which was at that time foremost in European civilisation ; and it was in combating the resistance of the Italian cities that the Hohenstaufens exhausted their power. Vain were all their victories, vain the re-erection of German feudal administration, in vain Barbarossa raised the Tuscan counts to the dignity of Princes of the Empire ; the towns were the stronger, for theirs was the higher civilisation, theirs the greater economical might, and the greater concentration of money as well as of military force.

The Church, though in reality far from approving these movements, made good use of them. In all other lands the Papacy remained hostile to all democratic changes. England was laid under interdict by the Pope as soon as Magna Charta was won ; but in Italy the Church wisely took the part of the cities, and with their help vanquished the Emperor. Yet it was but a losing victory ; the Church had scarcely time to exult, so quickly did its fall follow upon that of its great opponents.

It is not my object to relate here the history of this struggle ; I shall but try to throw, as it were, flying lights on it, and, as much as possible, I shall make the people who then lived and were made to feel its consequences speak for themselves.

Like all the great conflicts of history, this, too, though founded on the deep antagonism of irreconcilable principles, was constantly called forth and renewed by numberless greater or smaller causes of discord. Frederic

Barbarossa created a new one by marrying his son Henry to Constance, the heiress of Sicily. Sicily was considered to be a fief of the Papal throne. It was not so by any lawful right ; but a hundred and fifty years before Norman counts, having won the isle by conquest, requested the Pope to bestow it upon them as feudatories of the Church, and the Pope had willingly complied to their wish, one usurper thus guaranteeing another's right. The Normans said, "The kingdom is ours, for the Pope bestowed it upon us" ; the Popes said, "It must needs be our fief, for how could the Normans ask it from us had it been otherwise!" Nobody being at hand to object, this became the established state of things. Thus, by Henry's marriage, the German king and Roman emperor would have become the Pope's vassal as king of Sicily. To the many already existing difficulties and entanglements in the relations of the two powers was thus added a quite impossible complication, which led on to the final catastrophe.

The danger of the situation was not instantly felt; under the gloomy and terrible Henry VI. the House of the Hohenstaufen had reached the summit of its success. He ruled from the North Sea to the southern end of Italy, and, had his power been lasting, that of the Papacy would have been stifled by it. The Popes would have been as entirely dependent on the German emperors in Rome as later they were subject at Avignon to the will of the king of France.

The history of those times looks very different according as it is regarded from an Italian point of view, or, as is more usual, from that of a German partisan. Henry VI. was cruel and false to a degree unheard of even in a mediæval monarch. Rebellious Sicilian barons he ordered to be blinded, to be tarred and burned ; others were buried alive ; one had a red-hot crown nailed to his head. Henry

forced his own wife, the empress, to witness this spectacle, to punish her for sympathising with her countrymen. His early death, a most unexpected chance for the Church, was a relief to Italy. People dared to breathe again.

His widow found herself so helpless that she had no other resource than to put her son Frederick, who at the time of his father's death was a child of two years, under the wardship of the Pope. In this way she hoped she would at least save for him the throne of Sicily. In Germany Otto IV. became king and emperor.

Pope Innocent IV. saw all the power in his hands which Gregory VII. had claimed. The empire and Italy, France, England, Norway, Aragon, Leon, Hungary, and Armenia, yielded to his orders. He uttered the proud words, "As in the Lord's Ark of the Covenant the rod lay beside the manna of His grace, thus in the Pope's breast, with the science of the Divine law, lies the severity that destroys as well as the mildness that grants mercy." Fifteen hundred archbishops, bishops, and prelates attended the council which assembled in the Lateran in the year 1215, and which was meant as a demonstration of the power of the Church.

The unavoidable conflict between Pope and Emperor broke out again, the election of a Guelf and a partisan of the Church proving of no avail. The quarrel was about the imperial dominions in Central Italy, especially about the estates which belonged to the so-called Matildan Inheritance. The great countess had bequeathed imperial soil to the Church, and thus created another source of endless trouble, both powers claiming the estates as their own. The Hohenstaufen prince now appeared on the scene, as the instrument of the Pope, who sent his ward against the Guelf emperor. But first, in the year 1220,

Frederic II. was forced to swear an oath to Honorius III., by which he pledged himself never to unite Sicily with Germany, and to respect the rights of the Pope in Italy, an oath he could not keep without breaking that which he swore as Emperor to protect, and to augment the rights of the empire.

A doubtful peace was maintained during the reign of the gentle old Pope Honorius. After his death, Ugolino de' Conti was elected Pope as Gregory IX. He appeared like a "thunderbolt from the south," as his biographer puts it. He was an old man when he was elected, and he held the see fourteen years, yet he made war on the Emperor with burning rage and inexorable will.

The Emperor had vowed to go on a crusade, but could not undertake it, owing to a pestilence which broke out in his army. The Pope excommunicated him; a great assembly of clergy filled the church of St. Peter, each holding a lighted candle in his hand. The Pope enumerated all the transgressions of the Emperor, then he pronounced the sentence of the curse, all the priests repeated it and hurled their candles to the ground. Circular letters were sent by both parties to all the princes of the Christian world. "Tua res agitur," Frederic cried to all the kings; "There is no one among you whose power would not be menaced by the ambition of the Church."

The Emperor went on the crusade, notwithstanding the Pope's interdict; he recovered Jerusalem by a treaty, and when the Patriarch refused to crown an excommunicated monarch, he put the crown upon his head with his own hands. From Arab chroniclers we are able to gather most valuable information about this remarkable man. Out of courtesy to the Christian emperor, the kadi of Jerusalem had forbidden the muezzins to call the hours of prayer for

believers from the minarets; but Frederic summoned him to an audience, and forbade him to interrupt the customary rites for his sake, and is said to have added: "You Mussulmans are happy, not being continually bothered and hindered by the ambition of a priest like him of Rome." The Arab writer who saw him describes him as bald and shortsighted, and says that as a slave he would not have been of much value; then he adds: "The Emperor was a worshipper of nature, who made light of the Catholic creed, which was but a show and a plaything for him."

Meanwhile, the Pope had preached a crusade against him, and on his return Christians were thrown into consternation by seeing two armies of the Cross fighting against each other, one for the Pope, under the banner of St. Peter's Keys, the other imperial, under the sign of the Holy Cross. The Emperor's army was victorious, the Pope gave in, and once more they made peace, and in 1230 dined in Anagni at the same table. But, as the Florentine chronicler, Villani, says, "with all those treaties of peace there remained an evil disposition in the hearts of both," and as a Guelf he adds, "especially on the Emperor's side there was too much pride."

The peace lasted two years, until a new discord arose between the Emperor and the Italian towns. Mantua closed its gates to him. "What," the Emperor cried, "pilgrims may walk freely around the earth, and I am to be unable to move within the borders of my empire!" The towns implored the protection of the Pope, and in 1236 Gregory wrote the following letter: "The necks of kings and princes are bowed at the feet of priests, and the Christian emperors are bound to submit their actions not only to the Roman Pope but to all the clergy. The Lord, in subjecting the whole earth and all things visible and

invisible to the tribunal of the Holy See, has reserved the latter to His own judgment alone. It is known to all the world that the world's monarch, Constantine, with the approbation of the Senate and the people of the city and of the whole Roman Empire, decreed it to be right that the Vicar of the Prince of the Apostles, being the ruler of the priesthood and of all the souls in the empire, should wield the majesty over all terrestrial things and the bodies of men also. Thus thinking, that he, unto whom God has conferred celestial power on earth, must needs be Lord and Judge in all temporal matters too, Constantine bestowed on the Roman Pope the insignia, and the sceptre of the empire, the city with its dukedom—which thou art trying to seduce with thy gold—and the empire itself to eternity. Believing it to be impious that the Emperor of the Earth should wield any power in the place where the Head of the whole Christian religion is enthroned by the Emperor of Heaven, he left Italy to the government of the Pope, and for himself he chose an abode in Greece. From thence the Holy See transferred the empire to the Germans in the person of Charles, who humbly took upon himself a burden too heavy for the Roman Church: but by conceding to thy predecessors the Tribunal of the Empire and the Power of the Sword by coronation and unction, the Pope withal never renounced anything of his sovereign rights; but thou wrongest those rights of the Popes and thine own honour and fealty no less if thou dost not acknowledge him, who is the owner and creator of thy power."

It is obvious how the true relation between Pope and Emperor had been exactly reversed in the imagination of an age which had but a very dim notion of the real history of the past.

Constantine had never regarded the Bishop of Rome but as an insignificant priest, and such pretensions would have seemed to him, and even to Charles sheer madness. As late as the tenth century the Emperor Otto III. had smiled when he heard of the fable of Constantine and his forged Donation. In the thirteenth there was no man to doubt it; even the most earnest Ghibellines only regretted that things were so, and not otherwise. Dante wrote:

> Ah! Constantine, what evil came as child
> Not of thy change of creed, but of the dower
> Of which the first rich Father thee beguiled.

and Walther von der Vogelweide, the German minstrel, sang:

King Constantine, he gave so much,
  As unto you I will make known,
For to the See of Rome he gave
  The Spear, the Cross, the Crown.
That hour an angel cried in pain:
  "O woe! O triple woe is me!"
Once Christendom did well behave,
  But then upon its field did fall
A golden poison's rain;
  Its honey now is changed to gall,
To Thee, sweet Lord, I will complain:
  The priests will wrong the laymen's right,
  Too true has been the angel's sight.

Again the war broke out, and again the Emperor was victorious. "Lift up your eyes round about and see . . ." so he wrote to the princes. And the Pope answered in the same style: "From the sea is arisen a beast full of names of blasphemy, that rages with the paws of a bear and with the mouth of a lion, and whose body is shaped like that of a pard. It opens its mouth to hurl blasphemies at the name of God, and rests not but will throw similar

darts against His Holy of Holies and the Saints of Heaven."

This Encyclical—so an English chronicler writes—would have aroused all the world against the Emperor but that the Romish Court exacted so much money from all parts of the world. Five times as many taxes were paid from England to the Pope as to the English king himself. The nobility of France assembled in a Diet of Nobles to consult on measures to be taken against the unbearable financial claims of the clergy; a great many pamphlets of the time breathe a fanatic hatred against them. Dante, passing through the fourth circle of Hell, where covetousness and avarice are punished, notices that the heads of many of the sinners are shaven.

On the death of Gregory IX., Innocent IV. succeeded to the papal throne; the lion was followed by a fox, who was still more dangerous as an antagonist. He induced the Emperor's son to rebel against his father; murderers who conspired against Frederic's life received the Pope's blessing. In a rescript which is still extant they are called "the brilliant sons of the Church, on whom God has shed the light of His countenance."

Still the Emperor was victorious. His generals, Ezzelino Romano, the Lord of Padua, the Marquises of Lancia and Pallavicini, his natural sons, Frederic of Antioch, Enzio of Sardinia, and Manfred Lancia, were everywhere triumphant. The Pope fled to France, but all the princes refused to receive him in their territories. He then summoned a council at Lyons, which at that time belonged to the empire, and there pronounced the deposition of the Emperor. This was in the year 1245. "No peace with the viper's brood!" was the Pope's answer to those who wanted to persuade him to a milder course.

It is interesting to read what the chroniclers relate of the consequences of the struggle. "My soul is filled with horror," writes the so-called monk of Padua, "in relating the sufferings of my time and the destruction, for it is now full twenty years that for the sake of the Apostolic See and the imperial throne the blood of Italy has been shed like water."

Fra Salimbene of Parma writes: "In the days of Emperor Frederic, particularly after he was deposed from the empire, there were cruel wars, and the people could neither till their fields nor sow, nor reap, nor plant vineyards, nor gather the grapes, nor dwell in villages; men were unable to work except quite near the towns, where they were protected by the knights who dwelt in them; armed warriors guarded the workmen the whole day long, and the peasant cultivated the fields meanwhile. And this was necessary because of the robbers, marauders and vagabonds, whose number had increased beyond all measure. And they captured men and threw them into dungeons, that they should ransom themselves with money. And they drove the cattle away and ate them or sold them. And if they failed to ransom themselves" [Brother Salimbene always writes in great haste and excitement] "they hung them up by their feet or by their hands, or drew their teeth, or put thorns and gags into their mouths, that they should ransom themselves the faster, and that was more horrible to them than death. And they were more cruel than demons are, and a man in these times liked as well to see a man coming along his path as he would the Devil. And the country fell to waste and was deserted, because there were no peasants in the fields and nobody walked on the country roads. And the birds and the beasts of the forests multiplied beyond all

bounds, pheasants and partridges and quails, hares and roes, stags, buffaloes, boars and rapacious wolves. For they no longer found food near the villages, lambs and sheep as before, because the villages were all burnt, and therefore the wolves gathered in great packs around the ditches of the towns, and howled unceasingly because their hunger was too great. And by night they entered the towns and devoured men, who slept in the colonnades or on carriages, and the women and little children too. Sometimes they even dug through the walls of the houses and they tore the little children to pieces in the cradles.

"Nobody would believe it who did not see it with his own eyes, all the horrors which I saw perpetrated in those times by men as well as by beasts of all kinds. Yes, I have seen with my own eyes two foxes climbing the roof of the convent of St. Francis, near Faenza, to catch two fowls sitting on the cornice. And one of them we caught, and I was present."

Italy was rent by the hatred of parties—provinces and countries stood against each other, the nobility was divided, each town made war on the neighbouring town, and within, two exasperated parties fought one against the other.

"I had rather eat chalk than make peace with the Church," said the Lord of Sesso. "But," continues Brother Salimbene, who relates this saying in his chronicle, "he fed on good capons while the poor people famished. Need I say more? The luck of the bad is not of long duration in this world, and those of the Church's side had the best of the war, and that miserable man was constrained to fly and was secretly carried away from the town of Reggio, and stinking, excommunicated, without confession, deprived of the Lord's Supper, bereft

of peace he left the world, and was dug into the ground of a village near Campagnola."

Among the atheists and heretics in the sixth circle of Hell the great Florentine citizen Farinata degli Uberti lies in his fiery coffin, and to Dante's boast that the Guelfs were again victorious in Florence the shadow answers :

"That hurts me more than does this bed of fire!"

At his side lies buried the Cardinal Ottaviano degli Ubaldini, who once said, "If the soul exists, I have lost mine for the sake of the Ghibellines."

The fierce dissension of the parties became such a terrible and murderous plague to the land that people forgot the origin of the words, and fabled that two devils called Gibel and Guelef had been let loose from Hell to divide the world, and that from them the two parties had derived their names.*

Barefoot, clad in black robes with red crosses, the processions of Flagellants marched through the country, carrying branches and flaming candles in their hands, a great number of little children among them ; they went from town to town continually crying, "Pax! pax!" The spectacle of those processions occasioned an enormous emotion, and filled the minds of the people with terror and confusion. The Emperor's generals, Manfred and the Marquis of Pallavicini, prevented them from entering the regions under their command, and the Lords Della Torre, who ruled in Milan, ordered six

* The names, in truth, originated from the castle of Waiblingen in Swabia, which was a fief of the Hohenstaufens, and which in Italian was corrupted into "Ghibellino," and "Welf," a frequent name among the Saxon Dukes of Bavaria, the leaders of the opposite party in Germany.

hundred gallows to be raised, on which Flagellants should be hanged; to warn them from entering the territory of their town.

The tables were turned indeed, and the Emperor's had become the losing party. The victory of the Parmese, and the destruction of his camp at Victoria, the rebellion and death of his son Henry, the capture of Enzio by the Bolognese; so many disasters following in quick succession upon each other broke his spirit. None in his brilliant House equalled him. By many of his adversaries he was believed to be Antichrist in person, and that the old prophecy, according to which Antichrist was to be born of an old nun, should seem fulfilled, they spread the fable that Constance had been a nun before she married King Henry. He was fair-haired, of graceful bearing, not very tall—none of the Hohenstaufens were—shortsighted and prematurely bald. He had been brought up in Italy, and in character was half German, half Southerner. "He was a man," the Guelf Villani says, "of great ability and bravery, erudite and of graceful deportment, universal in everything; he understood Latin and the language of our people, German, French, Greek and Saracenic; he was endowed with all manly virtues, generous, a courteous giver, gallant and wise in war, and very much feared by his enemies. He was voluptuous in every way and led a luxurious life, and he was a heretic and an epicurean, and he did not believe in a life beyond the grave, and therefore, above all, he was an enemy of the clergy and of the Holy Church."

Even Brother Salimbene, who begins thus, "Of the true faith he had not a whit; he was sly, astute, covetous, and voluptuous, malicious, and irascible . . ." and follows it up with many lines yet fuller of reproaches and a whole

catalogue of various sins, concludes by saying, "Courteous he was, and gay, frolicsome, charming, and much gifted."

He seems a most remarkable man to us also; the founder of the first state in Europe which had a modern and centralised government and administration; for Frederic's kingdom of Sicily was the first absolute state. He was fond of pleasure and of a joyful spirit, as all Hohenstaufens were; he liked banquets and feasts; he was the author of several songs, passionate and endowed with talents of all kinds. There was no science in which he did not take an interest; he was the author of books on hunting and the treatment of horses. Many renowned scholars formed part of his Court, and the library was his particular care. He sent letters to Moorish philosophers in Spain, to learn what they thought on deep spiritual questions. Jews and Saracens filled important positions at his Court, his bodyguard was composed of Saracens, and an oriental harem followed him on all his travels and expeditions of war. He was said to have talked of "the three Impostors who founded the three chief religions of the world"; yet the same man persecuted heretics in his empire and crowned the corpse of St. Elizabeth. He may have done so from political motives, perhaps inwardly deriding himself and the spectators of the pious ceremony.

He appears to us full of contradictions, and we are unable to get at his true character because we see his reflected portrait only, the great impression which he made on the minds of men, but not his true self. It is difficult for us, almost impossible, to understand any men of those far-distant times, to analyse their character, because all that formed and influenced it is strange and

unknown to us ; how much more difficult to understand so complicated a character as that of this monarch, who stood on the verge of two periods! Many of his letters are extant, but written as they are in stiff Latin, and in the ceremonious style of his chancellor, they do not betray the soul of the man. His true being remains hidden. We can only note the immense impression which he made on Guelfs and Ghibellines, Saracens and Christians alike, and that the world trembled at his steps. We may note the impression he made and the deep marks he left in the memories of men, in the numberless tales and fables, in which he plays a part no less than in the works of chroniclers and poets, and in the charm which surrounds him to this day, who, as the chronicler expressed it, "lived glorious and a wonder to all the earth until the last day of his fate, who was invincible to all, and subject only to the law of Death!"

He died in the arms of his son Manfred on December 13, 1250, at Fiorentino, in Southern Italy. German and Saracen knights escorted the corpse, covered by a scarlet cloth, to Palermo. But the Pope wrote a letter: "Let the Heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad."

In the tenth canto of Hell the great Frederic lies in the sixth circle, with a large number of his followers in fiery coffins among those who had no faith.

But in Germany the people would not believe in his death, they fabled that he had hidden himself in the mount of Kyffhäuser, and would once return with the glory of the old empire. Much later, when the remembrance grew dim, people confounded him with Frederic the Redbeard, his grandfather, who became the hero of this legend. In Italy, too, Salimbene tells, people long distrusted the news of his death, according to the prophecy :

Sonabit et in populis :
Vivit et non vivit.
(Among the peoples will be said
He is alive and not alive !)

But the Emperor was dead indeed ; and when his sons Conrad IV. and Manfred had fallen after short reigns, and then Conradin too—each a brilliant meteor-like apparition—the house of Anjou came into Italy ; new wars, new times, a new era of the world's history declared itself, the true Middle Ages were over.

CHAPTER VI

SOCIAL CONDITIONS

THE time of Dante was a time of fermentation and change in the political as well as in the economical and intellectual life of Europe.

The theme of history is the development of mankind. It is the record of all the changes in the state of men which have occurred since the first evidences of our race on our globe; all the many changes in their ways of living, of procuring food and shelter, of preserving and adorning their lives; the changes of government, and of the relations between rulers and subjects, rich and poor, powerful and oppressed; the changes of customs, opinions, aims, ideals, and fancies. These changes take place sometimes very gradually, at others rapidly, but the most important are generally imperceptible and even if we try to trace the development either over a large territory or over a small one, we shall invariably find that it progresses at a very unequal rate, that new ideas always affect a few men first, that a few institutions are the first to be altered or to become extinct, while the mass of men grows but slowly conscious of the change. Then it spreads rapidly and its results often manifest themselves in sudden revolutions. The development always is more rapid in some countries than it is in others, and there again it may be

accelerated in some particular provinces or even places. It is for that reason that at all times and everywhere institutions and forms of the past—religions, laws, customs, systems of economy—are to be found, obsolete and fossilised amidst the vital and prosperous growths of the day, while the first germs and buds of those to come already begin to sprout in the midst of the old. It is for that reason that in almost every century there are men whose thoughts become the general opinion of future generations, who are ahead of their contemporaries by decades and even by whole centuries, and others who by their views and ways of living belong to the past. Men capable of discerning which ideas and which institutions are decaying and doomed to perish, and which are still vital or destined to be victorious in the future, are very rare, and this question is at the bottom of all social and political disputes.

In our own time means of communication and commerce having reached a height hitherto undreamt of, the nations being continually mixed up and brought into touch with one another, while every event, every new discovery and experiment is quickly known all over the civilised world, the development is faster, as well as more evenly distributed, than it was in the Middle Ages. Mediæval men and mediæval institutions were more rigid and immovable than ours, but at the same time were less uniform and monotonous.

To form a fairly just conception of the immense majority of mediæval men we must study those countries in which in our own time, though the elements be the same, modern civilisation is least developed. In the alpine villages of Europe, remote from the great lines of communication, villages inaccessible except by footpaths and roads for

ox-carts, where men live in narrowest catholic bigotry, where the priest is the only person who possesses more or less knowledge, there we shall find a state of life which will most resemble that of the Middle Ages. Certain likenesses in the political system may be found in the feudal states of the Indian Rajahs, and still more in the Albanese parts of the Balkan, where the institutions of clans and chieftains, the continual inroads and robberies, feuds and vengeances, the general insecurity and the necessity of self-help, may remind us of very prominent features of mediæval life. Wherever the observance of forms is most rigid and formalities are most valued, where the least amount of knowledge and the greatest superstition prevail, slow and undeveloped habits of thought combined with brutal and vehement passions, coarseness and insipidity in the sense of humour, cruelty in punishment and a certain unconscious respect of persons in high offices, of ceremonies and titles of all kind, there the state of men is most similar to the mediæval state. These are certainly the darker sides of mediæval life, but in them especially may be found the most marked difference between the civilised world of our days and the world of those times.

Nobody will ever understand life as it was in the Middle Ages, to whose mind the scarcity and difficulty of communication, the bad and dangerous roads, the small number of highways, and as a consequence of this the wide separation of places and the uncertainty of all news, are not continually present. What to-day is an easy trip of a few hours was then a long and dangerous journey, which nobody could think of undertaking without an armed escort. The only possibility of travelling to a somewhat remoter place without running the greatest

risks was to join the train of some great lord or ambassador who went the same way, or some great trade-caravan, such as a number of merchants undertook or equipped in common. Letters had to be sent in the same way, or by wandering monks, pilgrims, or daring pedlers. It took months and years to send a letter and receive an answer from a distant country, and the eventual receipt of such was very uncertain. In a time like this, numerous legends and fables were certain to spread and rule the life of the day. Thus provinces and countries were more remote and separated from one another than are continents to-day, a centralised and uniform government of a territory of any extent was quite impossible: the land had to be divided and given up to the government of smaller lords and the feudal system, the splitting of countries into the countless little states of the Middle Ages was a necessary result.

What are the much criticised and much derided little kingdoms and duchies of the former German Confederation (which in itself was but a remnant of those times) compared to the numberless little units, states, dukedoms, city republics, dynasties, acknowledged or not by the empire, their great suzerain power, which then were to be found on the smallest area?

Who can enumerate all the more or less independent governments of Italy in the thirteenth century? "Italy is my inheritance and the whole world knows it!" were the proud words which Emperor Frederic wrote to the Pope in the year 1236. But, in fact, the state of things was not so clear. Only the South, the kingdom of Naples and Sicily, might be called a unified country, but its existence was not of long date. A hundred and fifty years earlier it had been divided into the Saracen and

Greek provinces, into the Longobard dukedoms of Benevento, Capua and Salerno, in the courts of which the old German Longobard language still was spoken, the Norman counties, the republics of Naples, Gaëta, Amalfi, and other smaller baronies, which all had now become fiefs of the kingdom, but remained nowise in undisturbed peace with one another. Frederic II., however, had ruled the kingdom with iron energy, he established a centralised and absolute government in it, and ever since his death it has remained the most homogeneous State of Italy. But in the Central parts and in the North we find a motley confusion. There were the States of the Church with all their contested provinces, the feudal estates of their vassals, families who were always rebelling against the Pope and always fighting with one another, then the debatable fiefs of the empire, the marquisates of Tuscany, Spoleto, Ancona, &c., the estates of the Marquises of Montserrat, of Este, of Malaspina, of Pallavicini and of the smaller Counts of the Empire, the territories of the spiritual Lords, and particularly the innumerable city-republics, many of which already began to change into civic dynasties, and whose political position, doubtful in law and of undoubted power in fact, was soon to become the most important of all. And all these powers were contested, and at war among themselves. Every territory was continually splitting up and developing smaller administrative units, every one of which instantly tried to become as independent as possible and to enlarge its estate at its neighbour's expense. There was no vassal-count who would not rather have been a Count of the Empire, no town but tried to free itself from the superintendence of the imperial marquis and to govern itself, no bishop but wanted to be ruler and lord of his town

and diocese, no city that did not strive to make its bishop a citizen and its subject. Nor was there any common established law to smooth all this confusion. All was founded on custom, prescription, old writs of princes dead long ago, privileges, statutes, and treaties, which were constantly violated and broken by the natural development of things. The only common ruler and supreme judge, the Emperor, was far away, his power fluctuating and unsteady, now in dimmest distance or of such impotence that people sneered at it, again threateningly near and terrible to all; the execution of his orders depending now on the goodwill of his subjects, again on the force and position of his army. If he had long been away in Germany he was half-forgotten; at his Diets or at the provincial assemblies of his Legates the nobles and the consuls of the towns thronged to get the confirmation and renewal of their old rights and privileges or the granting of new ones, every demand being opposed to that of some neighbour; troops of jurists were occupied with bringing order into the confusion, of course without any effect, when by their very profession they had to found their decisions, not on the living growth of men and institutions, but on dead and antiquated words, forms and rules which, yet more to confuse matters, were themselves contested. Whoever was not pleased with their decision, whoever inclined to the Church, or felt himself powerful enough to do as he liked, kept aloof, and refused all obedience, taxes and military service. No emperor ever marched through the country to his capital without encountering resistance at every step, finding the door of every second town closed to him and his way; if at all victorious, marked by the smoking ruins of burnt cities and castles.

Every few miles the traveller found a new government and new laws; if he went a little farther, coinage, customs, dress, and even the language of the people were different, for the many dialects of Italy were practically so many tongues—a common Italian language for the use of well-bred people and literature had scarcely begun to develop. There is no shade in Dante's Hell or Heaven who does not at his first word recognise him as a Tuscan. Every hour almost the traveller's way was barred, and a toll, lawful or unlawful, was exacted.

He might chance to be in a place which was "imperial land" and governed by an official count, that is, an officer nominated by the Emperor; but part of it might belong to a convent or to the estate of a nobleman invested with "immunity," that is, exempt from the count's justice, but whose lords themselves dealt justice in their possessions. A little farther on, the country perhaps was subject to the republic of Florence, but the family of some feudal Count of the Empire, whose castle might be seen on the neighbouring hills, would claim it as his, or perhaps two towns might be quarrelling about the ownership of both village and castle, or some bishop's men might be found fighting for the Episcopal See of the nearest cathedral. The political system, under the rule of which such a state of things was possible, the mediæval system of both government and administration, is known as the "feudal system," the system of dividing the country and bestowing it on smaller rulers.

Landed estate and political power were always connected. The king was the greatest landlord, and therefore sovereign of the whole country; he granted "in fee," as it was called, large estates to the lords, his vassals, who by this were bound to be true to him and to do military

service for him whenever he required it, but in all other respects were sovereigns of the land they had received; they in turn naturally granted land under similar conditions to smaller lords, who in their turn leased it to peasants and serfs. The king and the greater lords also bestowed estates on their officers, so-called "fiefs of office," because they knew no other way of paying them. All these fiefs, though at first "lent" to this or that person for life, soon became hereditary, the government or the office was inherited with the estate, and estate, office and government soon became inseparably connected. This was not always the case, nor everywhere, but it was the general course things took. It was but a natural consequence that the smaller vassals felt themselves more bound to the greater vassals, their lords, than to the king, and held rather to the first, whose fathers had been served by their fathers, and who always had been nearer them, than to the latter; in this way the feudal lords were in a position to fulfil their duties to the king only when they were friendly to him, or saw their own advantage in it, or could be forced to do so. Hence the relatively small power of mediæval kings and the continual rebellions of their vassals; hence, too, the powerlessness of so many Roman emperors.

Infinite were the variety and the degrees of the relations in which men stood to the soil, the essential, and for a long period even the only valuable, possession in the Middle Ages. The freedom or the servitude of the person always was in proportion to the amount of power wielded over the soil; and thus numerous degrees of feudal dignity—(of "estates")—may be traced and enumerated from the sovereign lord, the vassal princes, and the feudatory counts, barons, and citizens down to the "servant" or

retainer, the peasant, the yeoman, and finally to serfs and slaves. Numberless varieties and combinations of the individual's position and personal rights were caused by the nature of his tenure. A peasant might hold in absolute ownership, while a knight held of some count or baron. Again, in every profession, among officials, warriors, citizens, and peasants, men in three different positions of civil right, freemen, retainers, and serfs might be found. The natural consequence of this was, that in the course of time all these classes mingled and changed very much, but considering only one and the same period they were sharply and strictly divided, caste-like, by position, honours, and, generally, by their dress as well. The finer materials and ornaments, silk, velvet, gold, pearls, and laces, the nicer colours of red and purple generally, were reserved for the higher classes by law and ordinance. The lower had to content themselves with coarse cloth. Hence the motley aspect and the variety of colours in every mediæval group.

The Germans had by their conquest carried this system into all countries of Europe. Clumsy as it was, it was the one best suited alike to their state of culture and to the condition into which by thorough devastation they had put the ancient countries. The richly developed commerce of antiquity had all but ceased to exist; the ruined towns had lost all importance; money existed but in inconceivably small quantity. Money has become too slow for the immense commercial life of to-day, and numberless paper substitutes, bank-notes, bills of exchange, cheques, and clearing-houses have been made necessary and invented to supersede it, but the commercial views of the Middle Ages worked with such a slow pulse that not even money was wanted to carry them out. This was the time

of barter, the raw produce of the soil being the general means of payment and measure of value instead of money. Taxes and rent were paid in kind, the value of things was reckoned in it.

The peasant paid to his lord a certain amount of work, fixed by the number of working-days on which he had to toil not for his own but for the landlord's profit; then a certain number of cattle, measures of corn or wine, and the like; the villager consulting an attorney or physician took a few fowls to pay him. Movable property, which requires sharper wit and better appliances, greater security and division of labour to make its production possible, and which to-day forms the chief part of the wealth of nations, was as nothing compared to immovable possessions, and even those were turned to account in a very primitive way.

It may furnish a good picture of the time to read what revenue a Florentine nobleman of the twelfth century drew from one of his villages.*

From four acres †	.	twelve days of work a year.
„ twelve acres	.	*Albergaria*, that is, the right of the lord and consequent duty of the villagers to lodge and feed a certain number of men for a certain amount of time.
„ „ „	.	Six *denari* ‡ and two hens.
„ one farm	.	A hog, a lamb, fifty-two days of work, and *Albergaria.*
„ another farm	.	Four *soldi*, § work in the vineyard according to the landlord's need, four hens, four loaves of bread, *Albergaria*, and an "adiutorium," which is to be paid every third year, &c.

* Reprinted from an old document by Davidsohn, "Geschichte von Florence," i. p. 308.

† *Starior*, an old Florentine measure.

‡ A silver coin.

§ A gold coin.

From this budget it is evident how different were the revenues from different farms; they were obviously not regulated according to the real value of the land, but resulted from the different manner and time of acquisition, and were founded on old treaties, prescriptions, and very often on violence.

But public laws were as various in different districts and towns as private rights in particular cases. Rights in general were seldom fixed by law for the whole population of a country, or at least for large classes of it, but were mostly derived from privileges granted to individuals or to corporations. Besides, there were eternal conflicts about judicial competence; nobody could exactly know, and everybody contested, which cases the lord and proprietor could decide by his own authority, which were reserved to the tribunal of the town, or to that of the imperial officers, to which office the parties had to appeal, and what, after all, was worth decision, for it is obvious that against a powerful opponent a sentence was quite unavailing, unless the plaintiff could make himself sure of the assistance of some still greater power. The Middle Ages, therefore, were the time in which the most long-winded, undying law-suits may be found combined with and interrupted by bloody self-help. A lawsuit between the Episcopal Sees of Siena and Arezzo—and afterwards between the towns themselves too—about eighteen parishes which both bishops claimed for their own, lasted from the beginning of the eighth until the thirteenth century; it survived all changes of governments, falls of dynasties and growths of new races; innumerable were the acts, sentences, appeals, commissions, and wild wars which it occasioned.

We must always think of mediæval countries as of one large scene of fighting. Besides the greater wars, all the

counts, cities, knights and villagers were constantly in arms against each other, the cause being now a disputed piece of ground and now a personal offence, an undying feud between two families, a questioned right, the dangerous growth of a rival town, or no cause at all but the love of warfare and plunder. In such cases it became very dangerous to leave the fortified places and walk or ride in the open country; to work in the fields or go to church became impossible. Each of these small expeditions began by burning and devastating the houses and fields, by capturing the retainers and the cattle of the opponent; this incessant state of war became such a nuisance and ruin for the country, that in France it led to the institution of the "Treuga Dei" or "God's truce." The Church commanded, under severe spiritual penalties, all men to refrain from all quarrelling from Saturday until Tuesday, and to be satisfied with the liberty of killing each other on the three days from Wednesday to Friday. Of course the prohibition was of no avail. In one of the songs of the Provençal baron, Bertrand de Born, a stanza runs thus:

I, sirs, am for war,
Peace giveth me pain,
No other creed
Will hold me again.

On Monday, on Tuesday, whatever you will,
Day, week, month, or year are the same to me still.

The pernicious famines of the Middle Ages were a natural consequence of these incessant devastations and reprisals, which ruined enormous portions of the produce.

Such was the state of things when, in their very midst, the germs of a thorough revolution began to develop by the rise and growth of cities. Men in those times had

even less clear ideas of their own state and of its necessary consequences, of what had been and what was to be, than have we. To-day we have at least a certain knowledge of the past, of the origin and gradual development of our own state; we study besides all the details of the present, and therefore are in a position to recognise the direction which some of the great currents of our own time will most probably take, though, of course, we, too, are subject to the law of perspective, according to which nobody can find a right point of view from which to survey a landscape in which he himself stands, a law as true of time as it is of space.

The most important social phenomenon of those times was the growth of the cities. The men in power had not the slightest presentiment of their importance, and as the powers of the past will ever do against those of the future, they instantly undertook a hopeless warfare against them.

Our civilisation is founded on the institution of cities; as we have already seen was the case with ancient culture. Only through the existence of towns and the consequent concentration of forces, division of labour, the constant friction and reciprocal influence of all forms of talent, which were impossible without them, could sufficient forces be developed and set free to produce what we call "culture." Modern civilisation also is founded and even more dependent on the existence of towns. Yet it may be said that our civilisation is already undergoing a change. The immense expansion and the rapidity of communication spreads it over the open country too, while, on the other hand, it has withdrawn in some degree from the smaller provincial towns, and has concentrated its central workshops in a few great cities with new advantages and new mischiefs.



Brogi photo.

The cosmopolitan character of those cities is in itself sufficient to be considered a symptom of a new era. Nevertheless, our civilisation is still founded on or made possible by the existence of towns, and is a consequence of town life, from which it derives its character, and not of country life. And its origins may be traced back to the twelfth and the thirteenth centuries.

When the Germans invaded the empire, towns were still unknown to them; those which they found in the conquered lands were ruined as much as possible, and the new lords of the soil took no notice of their existence. When the Longobards divided Italy into thirty-five duke-doms, they did this without any regard to the towns, and in the place of the municipal system of the Roman administration they made the county the basis of theirs, entirely disregarding the different conditions of town life and country life, and not making any distinction in the administration of either. Towns to them were places in which foolish people lived and thronged together in a curious way; a life which necessarily appeared to them as unnatural and unhealthy as to-day that of our towns must appear to a Red Indian.

But the towns recovered nevertheless; and in that state of general confusion the greater concentration of men inside their walls gave them a stronger power of resistance; as castles were used as places of refuge in times of danger by the peasants dwelling in their neigh-bourhood, the walls of the cities were a castle and a refuge to the whole region. In Germany towns were first founded to enable the border people to resist the inroads of the Hungarians. Remnants and indications of the old municipal constitution of the Romans seem to have been preserved in Italy in some way or other. The Latin race,

too, formed the stock of the population, and the feudal system never really took root in Italy. Its institutions were but superficial, and never became so thoroughly the political constitution of the country, as, for instance, in France or in Germany.

Commerce and handicraft slowly revived, and both produced a certain amount of capital. The expansion and growing intensity of the first made greater quantities of money necessary. It was coined on a large scale in the Italian towns, and from them streamed into the treasuries of princes and knights. Thus men gradually returned from barter to a monetary system of economy.

In time the townsmen began to be conscious of their force, then pride and love of liberty arose in their breasts, and in the twelfth century the city communes first stood as an equal factor by the side of princes and lords, too powerful to be overlooked by Pope or Emperor.

In them and around them the mediæval features no doubt prevailed; still, the first small beginnings of modern life were not wanting. There democracy was born after long and arduous struggles. In the mediæval country there were but masters and serfs, in towns the idea of free citizenship for all had its origin. Gradually, on the devastated ground a certain amount of property available for civilisation was created. As little as a man walking on a wintry night, hungry, chilled, fighting against wind, rain and snow, in constant fear of robbers and wild beasts, will think of anything but of how to get on and reach home, so little could men in the terrible struggle for life in the early Middle Ages find time to devote any part of their forces to intellectual occupations. Only the most protected class of all, the clergy, could attempt it, so far as it was possible. Material goods had to be produced, better

lodging and furnishing, more favourable conditions ot life, riches and greater security were necessary before sufficient intellectual force could be set free to work for itself and men enabled to enjoy life, knowledge and the production of those admirable playthings which we call works of art, and which at once are the most superfluous and the most necessary things in life.

CHAPTER VII

MEDIÆVAL KNOWLEDGE

THE principal aim of every mediæval man was his soul's salvation. Adopting the same word in an altered sense, we may say that to-day also a man's principal aim and object, even if he be not religious in a dogmatic or orthodox sense, is still the same. Instead of "salvation," say "integrity of soul" and a life as noble and fruitful as possible, and you will have expressed the aim of the greatest and best men of our era, of men like Goethe and Emerson, or other teachers of the present time. And though the difference is marked by the very words, though they prove how much more actual and earthly the ideal has become, the deepest meaning has remained the same. However little earthly may have been Dante's ideal, so long as he lived in this world of ours, though his sole aim may have been to prepare his soul for another world, he had to do it on earth. He, too, teaches us to purify our lives and to "lift our aims," with the sole difference that he teaches in accordance with the dogmas of the Catholic Church and uses its stern symbols in his language. But neither is an unearthly element lacking in the belief of the best and most aspiring of modern men, though their mysticism may use more universal signs, flowing symbols instead of the stiff and "frozen" forms of the Middle

Ages. Yet they are able to drink the pure water of the spirit from any source, and Dante, with his severe catholic imagery, teaches them no less than he taught the disciples of his own time.

But if leaving the few, who are aspiring and great-minded, we look at the multitude of men, there can be no doubt whatever that religion, its precepts, questions and forms, filled and ruled the inward and outward life of mediæval men in a much higher degree than in our own time. Even those who led the most savage lives were seized by the terrible idea of Hell, the ardent longing for Paradise, at every moment in which they awoke from wild combats and bloodshed for the goods and honours of this earth, or from brutish and voluptuous pleasure. The time when the Son of Man had walked on earth and suffered for their redemption lay not yet so far behind them, and the flames of Hell, the glories of Paradise, stood before them in terrible reality to choose between, over-powering all their thoughts and all their feeling.

Religion absorbed and embraced all other fields of life, faith was the sovereign virtue, and it was but natural that the occupation with religious questions called "theology" became almost the only occupation of the mind.

A period which demands a uniform orthodox belief cannot be favourable to criticism and doubt. Without doubt and criticism true science is impossible. A thinker who is forced to arrive at certain conclusions and results cannot think freely; a man who is not allowed to adopt what he finds or thinks to be true, but must needs adopt a truth fixed beforehand and by others, cannot be an honest investigator. In fact the results of mediæval science amount to nothing, and the reawaking investiga-

tion of the Renaissance had to begin afresh where antique science had halted.

It is self-evident that there was neither knowledge nor science in the times of utter savagery, the time from the sixth to the eleventh century ; the so-called science, which was cultivated in convents, does not deserve the name. To be sure the convents did estimable service by preserving the sparks, which one day could again break into living flames.

The ancient studies of the Latin part of the population had decayed, not only in consequence of the endless misery and the inroads of the barbarians, but still more perhaps through the hostile spirit of the Church, which regarded them only as tokens of pernicious paganism. Sentences from the letters of St. Paul like the following : "The wisdom of this world is foolishness with God"; "Knowledge puffeth up"; "Who seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise," had been valuable and much-used weapons against haughty philosophers who had opposed the new lore with superficial contempt. But the spirit of those sentences necessarily led to consequences inimical to science at large. As early as the fourth century, even before the decay of ancient culture, Eusebius wrote: "It is not ignorance which makes us think lightly of science in general, but contempt of its useless labour, while we turn our souls to better things." In the sixth century Pope Gregory the Great warned the Gallic bishop Desiderius in a letter to beware of the study of heathen literature, "because the praise of Christ and the praise of Jove are not compatible in one mouth." In the tenth century, the time of utter barbarism, the Abbot Leo of San Bonifazio wrote: "The successors of St. Peter wish for their

teachers neither Plato nor Virgil, nor Terence, nor any other of the philosophic cattle." When in the year 999 that memorable and exceptional man, Gerbert of Rheims, became Pope under the name of Sylvester II., a man who knew the ancients, who occupied himself with astronomy and owned geometric instruments, he soon was regarded by those around him as a sinister and dangerous wizard, who had pledged himself to the Evil One to become Pope, and when he died there was no doubt in people's minds but that the Devil had really come and fetched him. Thus on every hand all powers had combined to lay waste the fields of human thought. In vain had Charlemagne and Otto III. striven to revive the schools; neither time nor people were sufficiently ripe for it, the schools decayed, especially in the desolate Italian provinces; a man who was able to read was a marvel, and even among the clergy boundless ignorance was often prevalent.*

A change came with the eleventh and twelfth centuries; schools and universities arose, erudite laymen were not only possible, but even began to play an eminent part in the intellectual life of the period.

The amount of knowledge possessed by a generation will certainly influence the minds at least of its most prominent men; and Dante, though conservative in his aims and objects, and far from being a freethinker, was certainly one of the most enlightened and erudite men of the age. From the point of view of modern ideas, Dante and his works will never be understood. In the brains of our ancestors another world was reflected than in ours, every

* The German poet Hartmann v. d. Aue, who lived in the twelfth century, begins his song of "Poor Henry" with the praise:

"There was a knight, who such a scholar was,
That he the letters in a booke could reade."

step they took was made on another soil, and every action they performed founded on other views than those of our life. The very world into which they were born seemed other to their eyes than to ours.

The men of antiquity, and the great majority of men in the Middle Ages, lived on a solid disk, the limits of which were the final limits of the universe. Over this disk rose a solid blue crystal vault, on which sun, moon and stars were fixed as lamps are on the ceiling; behind this vault dwelt the gods, just as below the ground was spread the empire of the dead. In this concave space between the surface of the earth and the vault of heaven lived and died the races of "speaking men," and around the earth flowed the stream Oceanus, separating it from the mysterious foundations of heaven. One need but change the mythological names, and one has the ideas of the great masses in the Middle Ages, and even of many of our time.

The cultivated classes of the later periods of antiquity and of the Middle Ages held more enlightened views, founded on the system of the Egyptian astronomer Claudius Ptolemæus, who taught that the earth was shaped like a sphere and stood in the centre of the universe, while the sun, the moon and the other planets revolved around it. Long before Ptolemy, Plato and Aristotle had taught the same doctrine, and it is not at all impossible, nor even improbable, that they themselves were but following the opinions of previous thinkers.

More than that; full four hundred years before Ptolemy, the Alexandrine astronomer, Aristarchus of Samos, had asserted that the sun was the true centre of the universe, and that the earth gyrates around it as well as turns on its own axis, so that the apparent course of the sun

around the earth was but an illusion. But he had no success with his doctrine—mathematics and instruments had not reached a sufficient perfection to enable him to prove it. Seventeen centuries had to pass before Nicholas Copernicus carried the same doctrine to victory by his irrefutable calculations, after a hard fight against the Church.

That is one of the many proofs that modern science had everywhere to begin anew at the point to which antique science had just attained, and that the Middle Ages were simply a gap, a dead standstill in the history of empiric science.

What a chasm separates our perception of the world from that of the ancients! They lived in a small concave hollow in the midst of a solid and limited universe—we, disciples of Giordano Bruno, live on a tiny convex kernel in the midst of boundless space. The mediæval theory, that of Ptolemy, is a middle point between the two systems.

Our system is divided from both by a difference of incalculable weight; the older systems were both geocentric—that is to say, the earth was the centre of the universe; while for us the sun has not even remained in the central place; the sun, too, with all the planets, is but one of the innumerable fixed stars, the earth no more than an unimportant little moon, a small satellite of the fixed star we call our sun. Parallel with this change in our view of the universe went another change, which makes us see all life in another light. Not only the geocentric theory has come to a timely end, but the anthropocentric theory also. Man, too, is no longer the central being of the universe and of nature; we no longer believe that this whole world was created for man's use—man, too, is but one of the

innumerable passing phenomena of Nature—there is nothing to justify him in the belief that the importance which he has in his own eyes is allotted to him in the plan of creation. The modern man has become more modest than the man of former times, he no longer thinks himself the principal being, the end and the consummation of the world, nor his earth the central point of the universe; he knows that he is but the ephemeral inhabitant of a small island in boundless space.

This was not so in the time of Dante; the whole universe was narrower, smaller, more limited, and even cosier, if I may use the word; not immense, endless, dissolving, unimaginable, incomprehensible to the understanding as ours is. The earth was still its centre, and human beings the race for which it had been made; and around the earth revolved the firmament with its stars. The vault of heaven consisted of nine gigantic spheres fitting into each other; on the first seven the seven planets were fastened: the Moon, Mercury, Venus, the Sun, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn.

These heavenly spheres turn daily around the earth, while the planets glide slowly along them in the opposite direction, "as an ant creeps along a large revolving wheel."* The eighth heaven is that of the fixed stars; the ninth bears no stars at all, but is composed merely of clear transparent matter, and is called the "crystalline heaven" or "Primum Mobile," because it gyrates with incredible rapidity, and is the first of the movable heavens, for "beyond all those heavens Catholics place the Empyreum, which means fire-heaven," which is immovable and in eternal rest. "That is the seat of the most high God, who alone sees Himself in His fulness; it is also

* So Brunetto Latini in his "Tesoro," ii. 40.

the seat of the blessed spirits, as Holy Church teaches, who cannot lie. And Aristotle, too, seems to any man, who understands him rightly, to be of this same opinion in the first book of 'Heaven and the World.' This is the sovereign edifice of the world, in which the universe is enclosed, and beyond it is nothing; itself, too, is not in space, but created only in the creative spirit, the primary intellect, which the Greeks call 'Protonous.'" It is Dante who speaks thus in the fourth chapter of the second book of the "Banquet," and he says also that the ardent longing "of every particle of the crystalline heaven to be united with every particle of the most divine tranquil heaven" is the cause of the vertiginous movement of the first. By it this movement is imparted to the lesser spheres, and thus love, the longing for union with God, becomes the motive force of the universe.

The farther down we go the slower becomes the rotation, until, separated from the smallest heaven, that of the moon, by a zone of flames, the earth lies heavy and immovable, enveloped by the cloudy air. Under it is the funnel of hell, reaching down to its centre, where, farthest from God, at the centre of gravity, Satan has his dwelling. The southern hemisphere is covered by water, from which arises one single island with the mount of Purgatory. In the centre of the northern hemisphere lies Jerusalem, the place where the Lord descended upon earth, where He became man and lived and suffered. This hemisphere is inhabited by "erring man"; below it are the evil spirits and the souls of the damned, high above it the blessed spirits have their mansion in the ten heavens.*

* Dante's doctrine is that the tenth spiritual heaven is the real mansion of the blessed, and that only their phantoms appear in the nine heavens which are in space.

That is the world of Dante. How grand is his conception, how spiritual, the structure of the universe passing gradually from earthly grossness into pure spirituality! The whole system is a reflection in space of the evolution of man's history, the central fact of the world as well as of history being the passage from the Fall of Man to his Salvation, the descent of God upon earth and the elevation of man into heaven.

In Rome resided God's viceroy upon earth, the Vicar of Christ, the spiritual regent of men during their terrestrial life. The situation of the earth in the centre of creation was very important to the Church; the very system of the universe seemed to enhance the Pope's importance. It is easy to understand why the Catholic Church so strongly opposed the doctrine of Copernicus: when the earth was no longer the capital, but only a remote little province of God's universe, the Church could never more attain to that world-ruling, sky-reaching importance which it had held before.

Not every erudite man of the Middle Ages had such a deep symbolical view of the world as Dante, not every one was able to see it interwoven and penetrated by such deep spiritual connections. But the mechanical structure which I have described was generally adopted by the mediæval scholar. It bears all the signs of mediæval thought, which was never founded on experiment and investigation, but on imagination and authority. There never was a time when so little, and at the same time so much, was known as in the Middle Ages, for people really knew everything; they had ready explanations for every phenomenon; very clever explanations they often were, but always untested; whatever was or seemed possible, whatever could be made plausible in words was imme-

diately accepted; people did not like to doubt, and even the impossible could be dealt with and accepted as a miracle.

The positive science of the Middle Ages was limited to a small number of traditions from the ancients, corrected according to the Bible, and later on augmented by a few facts drawn from Arab scholars. In astronomy, mathematics, in the whole region of natural science, men had not at the end of the period got one step farther than at the beginning. They had adopted ancient learning with all the fables inherited from the ancients, who themselves had scarcely found the method of empiric investigation, and they eagerly added thereto any new fiction they met with. The notions of nature, of history, of life in a scholar's brain as well as in that of a peasant were a chaotic mass of strange legends, fables, and fantastic errors.

In the 15th canto of the "Divine Comedy," Dante, wandering through the third region of the seventh circle of hell, sees the naked souls of those who have sinned against nature running on glowing sands along the banks of a river of blood, while a continual fiery snow falls slowly and ceaselessly upon them. One of these, in passing, snatches at Dante's robe and cries out:

"O, marvellous!" and though the sinner's face is quite "baked" by the flames, Dante recognises him and cries: "Is it you, Ser Brunetto?" and later on he says:

> "Well I remember—and it paineth me—
> The dear paternal face of him who taught
> How man may stride into eternity!"

It is Ser Brunetto Latini, renowned in the thirteenth century as a great Florentine scholar and statesman. When the Guelf party was expelled he became an exile,

and while living in France he wrote in French an encyclopædia of the knowledge of his time, or, as he himself styled it, "A condensation of all the many parts of philosophy to a short summary." Such encyclopædias had been composed ever since the ninth century; the farther back we go the more fantastic they become. Dante himself attempted a popular work of this kind in the "Banquet," and he did it in a most original way, as he did everything, but the work was never completed and remained fragmentary. Brunetto's book stands about on the level of the period, and is doubly interesting to us, as Dante expressly styles him his master. He called it "Li tresors" ("The Treasure"), and wrote it in French, but it was soon translated into Italian.

In this book, after a short classification of the different sciences, he first relates the most notable facts of history. He conscientiously begins with the creation of the world, of angels and devils, of whom he assures us that scarcely an hour after their creation they fell; then he proceeds to the creation of man, tells of Original Sin, and gives a short account of nature and the functions of the human soul. Then follows patriarchal history according to the Bible, and adorned by some corrupted fragments of Greek mythology. He tells of Nimrod and his son Cres, the first king of Greece, whose son and successor, Jupiter, became Lord of Athens. Jupiter had two sons, Darius and Dardanus, and with this we arrive at the Trojan war and the flight of Æneas to Italy; he enumerates the kings of Italy up to the foundation of Rome, adding that Rome was founded 4324 years after the destruction of Troy. In a former chapter he told of the kings of England, who were all descended from Brutus, a son of Æneas; in the next chapter he relates the conspiracy of Catilina, then the

story of Julius Cæsar, then that of the kings of the Franks, who were likewise descended from two fugitive Trojan "barons," Antenor and the younger Priam. The next forty-seven chapters are devoted to the history of the kingdom of Israel and the foundation of Christendom, and then four chapters to the story of the Roman Empire until Frederick II.; the first is told as the Bible tells it, the latter, in spite of its brevity, is full of gross errors.

This work of Brunetto is a type of many similar histories written in the Middle Ages with a fantastic variety of contents.

Having thus exhausted history, the author turns to cosmology and gives information about the four elements of which all matter is composed; he explains how they are distributed throughout the world according to their gravity, and how the mixture of the four elements in the composition of corporeal beings causes them to live in higher or lower regions and makes their nature either more lively or more phlegmatic. So the birds live in the air, because there is more of the elements of fire and air in their composition. The four temperaments correspond to the four elements. But there exists in addition a fifth element called "Orbis," "which has nothing of nature in it," but is noble and indestructible, and is the stuff of which the heavens and spirits are made. He explains why the world is round, and what is the origin of rain, snow, wind and thunderstorms, inextricably mixing truth and falsehood. We are informed that there are clouds in which winds are enclosed; these clouds are driven against each other as balloons are, and by the noise of their collision produce the thunder, and by their friction the lightning.

A description of the structure of the universe follows

next, which on the whole resembles that adopted by Dante. Here we learn the dimensions of the mediæval world, for Ser Brunetto knows that the circumference of the earth measures exactly 20,427 Lombard leagues in length ; the size of the sun is just $166\frac{3}{10}$ times as great, while the distance of the firmament, that is of the heaven of the fixed stars, from the earth, is 10,066 times as long as the earth's diameter. Short but valuable information is given about the influences of the stars on terrestrial events, about Saturn, "who is cruel, false and of a cold nature"; Jupiter, on the contrary, is "soft, merciful and rich in all good"; Mars, "hot, warlike and of evil influence, and therefore was called of old the god of battles." The sun is a "good imperial star"; Venus, a "beautiful star, soft and full of good airs, full of goodness"; but Mercury is "changeful, according to the good or evil nature of the planet in whose neighbourhood he chances to be." Many true but inexact observations are given on the course of the planets, for in the Middle Ages peasants generally knew more of celestial movements than cultured people of to-day.

The third book begins with geography; it is treated rather concisely and is full of fables, like those told in the tales of Sinbad the sailor in the "Arabian Nights," or in the tale of Duke Ernest, a favourite hero of mediæval story-books. We hear of men who are born old, of men who have but one eye in their forehead, and others who have no head at all, but whose eyes are fixed in the shoulders; of the one-legged cyclopes and other marvellous tribes, all dwelling in India.

In natural history, which is mostly drawn from Pliny—the whole book is compiled from all possible earlier compilations—the first part treats of fishes, and tells more or

less fabulous things of all of them. Among fishes we are surprised to find the crocodile, which weeps as often as it has swallowed a man, and another little animal called "calcatine," which eats its way right through the crocodile and in this way kills it. In the chapter on the whale the episode of the prophet Jonah is told; two other animals, which likewise belong to the fish family, are the hippopotamus, which is remarkable for bleeding itself when it feels ill, and the sirens. But the reality of the latter seems doubtful even to Ser Brunetto Latini, and he admits that they may be considered as mere symbols.

Very interesting details are given about the snakes, which take out their poison and hide it under a stone whenever they go to drink; about the "Aspis," which bears a sparkling jewel in its head, and which to evade the snake-charmer presses one ear to the ground and closes the other with its tail. A snake with two heads may be found in the "Empire of Women." "The basilisk is a kind of snake, and is so full of poison" that it glistens visibly through its skin, and that not only the poison but its very stench poisons everything far and near, pollutes the air and makes the trees wither; its look kills the birds in their flight, its glance has a numbing influence on man, but when the man is the first to see it "it is said it loses the power to harm." We are further informed about dragons and about the salamander which lives in the fire.

Then come the birds; and, finally, he treats of mammals, to which class belong the ant and the chameleon. Even here there is no lack of fables, such as that of the wolf, which, when howling, holds his forepaws to its mouth to delude people into the belief that a whole pack is present; that of the unicorn, which lies down and falls

asleep as often as it encounters a virgin, and of many other beasts wholly unknown to us.

The second part of the work contains moral science and a fragment of political science, which are irrelevant to our present object.

Thus we are soon at the end of our survey of mediæval knowledge. As to mathematics, the few works which remained from antiquity were known to few; in philology Dante himself perhaps made the first step.

But, childish as this small sum of corrupted knowledge may appear to us, we must beware of underrating the intellectual power of the period.

In the first place, this science with all its fables had been received from antiquity. The knowledge of the great Greeks was no greater; of course, what in antique times had been first essays of investigation, essays in which errors and fables were inevitable, were accepted in the Middle Ages with the blindest credulity; it was and remained a dead mass of traditions, and not the slightest attempt was made to carry it farther or even to test it. But then mere knowledge has very little to do with mental ability.

Intuition, quick insight, broad views, the power to use knowledge are the signs of genius—and knowledge is only the material, the bricks with which genius must construct buildings. Every schoolboy of to-day knows many things which Plato and Dante never knew; every schoolboy of the next century will know facts of which Goethe would never have dreamt; but, for all that, he will be far from being a Plato or a Goethe. And we who laugh at the meagre knowledge of those times are far from being the superiors of Dante, or possibly even of Ser Brunetto Latini. A fool will be a fool in the twenty-second century,

and a genius was a genius in the Middle Ages, even when he believed that there were serpents with two heads and that the hippopotamus was a fish.

Thought makes the thinker, and depth and breadth of thought make the great thinker. We may go still farther back, into still more ignorant times, times in which reading and the alphabet were unknown, times from which no name has remained to us. In the uncultured primeval times of the Germans, of the Greeks, of the Jews, when not the slightest vestige of science could be thought of, the deepest thoughts of men were clad in the form of religion and myth. The men who invented the legend of the fall of Adam and Eve, the myth of the rape and the return of Proserpina or that of Prometheus, the saga of Baldur's death and Baldur's lament, the saga of the Twilight of the Gods—or the men who gave to those myths the deep and significant forms in which they have been delivered to us: those men, though we do not know their names, nor when or where they lived, belong to the deepest thinkers and poets of all times, and the thoughts expressed in these myths are no less powerful conceptions than "Faust" or "Hamlet," the Copernican system, or Darwinian theory.

For all these contain primary thoughts, intuitions of eternal laws and eternal phenomena, and wherever the human mind caught and expressed them, there it showed the surest signs of true genius. Nor was this lacking in the Middle Ages. For all that, I am far from denying that ignorance was a defect which had often the most harmful and even horrible consequences; and it certainly must be admitted that our knowledge is a progress.

But who knows how much of which we feel surest will be proved to be false by coming generations, what colossal

errors may be brought about by those modern methods of thought of which we are so proud, how people will laugh some day at the blindness and the ridiculous notions of our time! Every generation has its own "blinkers" and sees but the defects of its predecessors, while it applauds itself for having reached such a high plane.

It is true that it took a long time for mediæval men to find intellectual and artistic expression for their own life, but that life itself was full of all elements of poetry: of powerful passions, an imagination which was but too exuberant, and the greatest variety of forms. With a deep intensity of feeling it combined a naïve impulse to express everything in a way which impressed the senses, not the intellect, as with us, and, more than all, it possessed a pathetic earnestness in life and expression which might move us to envy, and which produced all the glory of late mediæval art.

Science and knowledge were regarded in another light than they are to-day, but the notion they had of them had its deep foundation in ancient ideas. The philosopher who to us appears more essentially Greek than any other, who in our eyes is the representative of Greek thought, Plato, pointed out to mediæval investigation the way which it involuntarily followed, for it was he who opened the way to the most subjective idealism, who created the boldest ideologic system in which he gave an arbitrary explanation of the universe. In the very words which Socrates speaks to Theætetus, "Come, let us learn what truth is, but let no profane person approach; the profane are those who credit nothing but what they can touch with their hands"—in these very words Plato points out to the student a direction which leads him away from all ways and aims of modern investigation and into the

realm of bottomless speculation. This turning away from the dominion of the senses, which he continually preached, the doctrine that the philosopher is not to occupy himself with that "which is only born to die," but has to explore the realm of the Infinite, Primary Being, and the Essence of Things, this doctrine was followed in the Middle Ages much more strictly than in his own time. Antiquity developed all tendencies in the overflowing abundance of its manifold gifts, and together with the purest idealism we owe to it the beginning of all empiric sciences. But the Middle Ages with their ruling religious idea, "My Kingdom is not of this world," found quite after their own heart this flight of thought from all that belonged to the senses, from all that formed part of nature, to abstract speculation on thought itself and on the things "which we cannot know."

And, considering the deep and eternal longing of mankind for the solution of the insoluble questions: what and wherefore are we? what is true? how came the world into existence? is this life of ours the final one?—who shall say that the struggle of human thought to find its way through this labyrinth was a "false" one, who dare assert that we to-day have really found the true path?

They explored to the best of their knowledge, and we do the same; if their results were less palpable and visible than ours, they were no less deep. We must beware of believing that true progress lies only in scientific discoveries; in innumerable, impalpable, untraceable influences may lie the immense value of a period of human activity to the history of civilisation. One thing at least is certain: the final outcome of the errors of scholasticism was critical science.

CHAPTER VIII

SCHOLASTICISM

From the seventh to the eleventh century all intellectual life in Europe was more or less limited to the Church. Not only did religion itself occupy men's minds to a much greater extent than to-day, but whatever intellectual life there was independent of religious thought proceeded from the Church, the little knowledge that existed at all was to be found among the clergy, and the remnants of ancient science in MSS. and parchments were kept in convents.

All teachers* of schools were clerical and all pupils too—the word "clerk" (scribe) is derived from *clericus*, because in the Middle Ages a man who could write and a clergyman were identical. Clergymen, therefore, were indispensable in all offices. Of the seven high offices of the empire which were reserved to the seven electors, four only, that of Arch-butler or Arch-steward, for instance, would be filled by temporal lords, but the offices of the Arch-Chancellors were reserved to the three spiritual electors, the Archbishops of Mainz, Trier, and Cöln.

* The few exceptions to this rule, on which Ozanam puts such stress, in his study on "Schools and Instruction in the Middle Ages," seems to have been found in Italy only, and cannot alter the fact that teaching as well as learning in those times is entirely of a spiritual character.

The painters, too, were clergymen, and in the earliest times—at least in the newly cultivated countries—even handicraft and agriculture had been taught by monks.

Europe owes much to the Roman Church. But the science of the Church was very limited, and the moment inevitably came when the lay world had received all that the Church could give and wanted more. Unhappily, the Church had made a skeleton system of her treasures; not only of religious dogmas, but of all her scientific doctrines as well, and whosoever dared to doubt or criticise it was a sinner and a heretic. As she had decreed that the sun turned round the earth, even so the smallest details were fixed and unchangeable. Even the painter was bound to paint the beard or the robe of a saint only in one way. A synod had decreed it so. As long as the Church was in a position to give, and laymen to receive from her, all was well, the relations between them were those of a mother to her child, of a tutor to the pupil. But as soon as a sufficient number of laymen knew quite as much as the clergy, and began to work on independently for themselves, the Church said "Stop." In that moment the great historical rupture was completed, and the Church henceforth was the retrograde and obstructive power in the development of mankind. She has been to the human mind like a mother, who brings up her child with love and care, but will not suffer it to become a man independent of her maternal care and superintendence, who would rather murder it than suffer it to become so.

But independence must be the aim and scope of all education, and parents who will not suffer their children to acquire it must invariably lose them. Therefore the development of mankind in those times was above all and on every field an emancipation from the ruling Church;

even with those who never thought of rising against her, Dante, for instance, or St. Francis, and many others.

The greatest innovators in history generally tried but to restore an old state. Jesus came but to renew the Old Covenant ; Cæsar, a revolutionary leader of the people, founded the greatest of all monarchies. Very often the reactionist is unconsciously working for progress, the radical for reaction, and those who seemingly are the most peaceful of all are preparing revolutions. There is nothing of which people have less clear notions than of the real tendency of their own work. This was also the case with mediæval philosophy.

To give here anything but a very superficial survey of it would be impossible. The reader who wants to learn more about it may work his way through the books of Hauréau and others. The writings of mediæval philosophers are innumerable ; a whole row of great names adorns their history. Men of immense learning and narrowest judgment were among them, men of venomous orthodoxy, some who rank among the boldest and freest investigators ; and others, again, whose conceptions were grand and poetical. As the knowledge of the Middle Ages was borrowed from the ancients, so, too, their philosophy is based on the poor remnants of antique philosophy, but its wings were clipped and the great freedom of thought was wanting. Those remnants which had been preserved and destined to become the basis of new speculation were the fewest imaginable: a little work of Plato, the "Timæus," perhaps the "Phædo" too, small and corrupt fragments from Aristotle, and a few works of commentators, especially the so-called "Isagoge" of Porphyry (an introduction to the "Organon" of Aristotle), and works of Boëthius.

In the thirteenth century the works of Aristotle were introduced by the Arabs, who had known and studied them already for three hundred years; and though they were only to be had in most corrupt translations, they furnished a mighty inspiration to European philosophy.*

But a few sentences are sufficient to the human mind: every deep word is the key to a door leading into the universe; using a few sentences as their stepping-stones, the philosophers of the Middle Ages pierced into all the depths of the mind, all the immensities of space. There is no more airy, no bolder ladder than words, every step opens a new prospect, and, like sudden wings, the thoughts which every new word calls forth will carry the thinker into the infinite. There are no paths of early or of modern philosophy through which the philosophers of the Middle Ages had not walked, too, in their own ways. They became sceptics, materialists, pantheists, very often without being aware of it; the boldest and deepest thinker of the earlier time, Johannes Scotus Erigena, anticipated the grand views of Spinoza.

A mere chance, if one is allowed to say so, fixed the path of mediæval philosophy; a mere chance made Aristotle their lord and master; by mere chance were he and Plato put into that dominating position in philosophy which they still occupy to-day, and in which they have been represented in Raphael's "School of Athens" in the Vatican. Had the works of Democritos, for instance,

* The civilisation of the Mussulmans in the eleventh and twelfth centuries was such higher than that of contemporary Europe, and if in their chronicles they designated the Crusades "inroads of barbarians," they were at least as right in doing so as European writers were in disparaging the previous Saracen invasions into Europe, which had exactly the same scope: booty, renown, and the expansion of a faith.

been preserved, the whole intellectual history of mankind would have taken another way—to the same ends.

A few words of Porphyry furnished to the Middle Ages their formulas, methods and problems. He turned the attention of men to the question of "abstracts," particularly of "universals." The existence of the individual man or beast is proved by the senses; but what is the real nature of "man" or "beast" in general? Does "man" in general exist, or is it only a conception of our brain, a formula necessary for thinking? And if it is only a thought or notion, is it a necessary and true one? Does anything corresponding to it, perhaps an essential idea, exist in a Divine Mind, in creation or beyond, to test it? And what is the nature of abstract notions like "wisdom" or "beauty," which undoubtedly seem to be less real than a wise man or a beautiful thing? And what is the nature of farther intellectual beings whose existence is warranted by religion—Angels, Devils, Divinity itself?

Do universals really exist, or are they mere words?

And if they exist, is their existence a corporeal one or not? And if they really exist, do they only exist in and with individual things (as wisdom in a wise man), or may a separate essential existence, as "wisdom," be ascribed to them?

It is known that Plato said: There are Ideas, that is, primary conceptio s of all beings and things, in the intellect of the first Creator, God. These exist "ante rem" (before the thing exists) and they are essential. In the individual things only the images of those primary ideas are expressed "in re" (in the thing). "Post rem" (after the thing) the notions of it exist in the human intellect as necessary reflected images of the primary thoughts of God. That is the doctrine of the boldest Realism. We

to-day would call it "Idealism," but in the Middle Ages it was called "Realism" because it attributed reality to what was ideal.

Against it stood the opinion of severe Nominalism, which ran thus: The abstracts are only words (nomina) they exist but as formulas of our brain, no conclusion from them on reality is permitted, nor is it possible that they should in any way influence it.

Many variations and shades were possible in the answer to the three chief questions as well as to all the countless subordinate questions which arose in consequence. An intermediate opinion was that of the "Conceptualists," who said: "It must be conceded that the abstract is only a thought, but then it certainly exists as a thought, and has besides a certain objective existence in and with the thing." It is obvious that this was but a lame and undecided solution which was very near pure Nominalism. Even within the limits of each school the uncertain and manifold meaning of such words must necessarily lead to very different conclusions. Their halls resounded with debates, and their parchments were covered with meditations, acutest wit vying with senseless and sophisticated confusion, strongest thought and abstruse, bottomless speculation inextricably mixed. On premises which had not the smallest foundation in fact artificial worlds were constructed, like brilliant castles on swimming and melting icebergs. Two things had to remain uncontested in the whirl of dispute: the words of the old masters and the words of the Church; the dogmas. These were sacred and unquestionably true. That meant, the icebergs on which the castles were built were declared unmeltable. Considered in themselves from the point of view of exact science, the works of scholasticism are an

immense Sisyphean labour of six hundred years on "that which we cannot know."

The first great name in scholastic philosophy is that of Johannes Scotus Erigena, which means John the Scotchman, born in Ireland, head of the school of Paris at the time of Charles the Bald. His was a broad and bold mind. He despised logic and dialectics as mere words, ascribing the highest authority to Reason alone. True philosophy he declared identical with true religion, and yet a mystic and poetical turn of his mind made him a realist. In brilliant and pathetic style he announced the doctrine of Spinoza, that Essence is but one and the same in all, and all the rest but forms of Essence. He also conceded that this highest problem of all was in reality incomprehensible not only to the senses of man, but to his intellect as well. This brilliant and modern thinker, whose appearance in the Carolingian time will ever remain an historical enigma, is said to have died as Abbot of Malmesbury, murdered by his own monks. His writings have been forgotten. His main work, "De Divisione Naturæ," was discovered towards the end of the twelfth century; a short time afterwards it was condemned by the Church, and again fell into oblivion.

Speculation in those times never was quite without danger, philosophy and its problems were so nearly related to theology. The wonderful problems of the Trinity, of the Essence of Him who was God and Man in one person, the nature of angels, creation out of nothing, were themes which could not but allure minds bent on investigations like the aforesaid, and which it was as impossible to avoid as dangerous to touch, in a time when theology was the main science, when every philosopher was a member of the clergy, and most certainly a Doctor

of Divinity. A few words which seemed heretical to the majority of any provincial synod could bring ruin on the man who had uttered them. A few philosophic remarks on the "intellectual Presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper" destroyed Berengar of Tours.

The antagonism of the two main schools became evident in the eleventh century by the contest between Roscellinus and St. Anselm of Canterbury. The opinion of the Conceptualists, which already in the ninth century had been expounded by the German monk Rabanus Maurus, was represented by one of the boldest and most interesting of mediæval philosophers, no less famous as a lover than as a scholar and orator, around whom many thousands of disciples thronged from all parts of the earth, so that the halls of the university became too small for his audience, and he had to teach in the open field: this was Peter Abélard, born in the year 1079, near Nantes in Brittany. He, too, had to defend himself against the repeated and dangerous attacks of Churchmen. Scepticism on one hand, rigid conservatism on the other, were the results of the first period of scholastic philosophy.

In the thirteenth century the works of Aristotle * were brought from the Orient, and with them came a marked rise in philosophic endeavour. "La philosophie," says Hauréau with some exaggeration, "fut la passion du treizième siècle." The first who treated the Aristotelian philosophy methodically was a Dominican friar, Albertus Magnus. He was originally a count of Bolstedt, born in

* The Emperor Frederick II. had ordered the translation and presented them to the University of Bologna. The Church repeatedly condemned them, but in vain. They became the basis of all science. The schoolmen call Aristotle simply the "philosopher."

the year 1193, in the little town of Lauingen in Swabia, and he died at Cologne, eighty-seven years of age, in a cell of his Order, after having been Archbishop of Ratisbon for many years. He was called "Doctor Universalis." His writings fill twenty-one folio volumes. In philosophy as in theology, in astronomy, chemistry and mathematics, his works were "rien moins qu'une véritable révolution." Notwithstanding, a disciple of his, St. Thomas of Aquino, though a man of much less marked originality as a thinker, attained a much higher position in mediæval philosophy. Descended from the Sicilian counts of Aquino, related to the race of the old Norman kings of Sicily through his mother Theodora, a broad-chested, heavy and clumsy man, he was called by his fellow students "The great dumb ox from Sicily." "His bellow will one day be heard through all the world," his teacher Albert had said on hearing this nickname. The writings of the "Doctor Angelicus," as he was called, have occupied a ruling and lasting position in ecclesiastical erudition. He more than any other was the teacher of Dante, though the latter in the main questions did not exactly follow his doctrine, for Dante undoubtedly was a realist. Both Albert and Thomas were the pride of the Dominican school. Not without opposition and jealousy did the Order of St. Francis wrestle with them for the palm of scholarship. Many and different opinions were represented by the brethren of this Order; many among them were mystics; an abstruse and subtle realism was taught by the "pillar," the "sun," the "torch" of the school, the "Doctor subtilis" Duns Scotus. But two men of the Franciscan Order attract our attention more than the rest, for they prepared the way to modern science, Roger Bacon and William of Ockham. The first, born in Somerset in 1214,

was the first discoverer of the power of steam, and in parts of his books, which to us seem almost incredible, he predicted the invention of the railway, the great oceanic steamers, gunpowder, and the use of electricity. He wrote in a broad and free style, careless of scholastic methods and dialectics. In his books may be found sentences like the following, which might well have been written by Emerson: "Always let us reject what is the opinion of the majority, and every habit of thought let us hold in suspicion." He was made to feel the consequences of uttering such revolutionary ideas in the thirteenth century; he died in the year 1293, after nine years of imprisonment. Such spirits belonged to the future, they required a freer air, they found no breathing room in the Middle Ages, and were doomed to suffocation from the beginning. Their appearance, however, was a sign of the times, it announced that the end of the Age was near. The other great Franciscan monk, and he, too, like Roger and so many others, an Englishman, was William of Ockham, the redoubtable enemy of the Pope, who, condemned to life-long imprisonment by the Church, lived free and pleasantly in Germany under imperial protection. He said to the Emperor Lewis: "Do but protect me with thy sword, I will protect thee with my pen." By the victorious and final enthronement of Nominalism, by a number of clear and brilliant sentences, destroying the inexact methods and fanciful results of his predecessors, he prepared the victory of critical science.

Entirely dominated by theology, from which it was but a branch, mediæval philosophy had no other scope, and was not allowed to have any other, but to establish the harmony between the dogmas of the Church and human reason, to prove that, whatever was taught by the Church,

was the natural result of logical reasoning as well. Dogma stood firm and rigid, and woe to Reason if Reason dared to swerve one smallest step from its prescribed path. Even in the works of St. Thomas of Aquino the Archbishop of Paris, Tempier, found sentences which he proved to be heretical. Reason was in the position of a horseman who is allowed to ride "freely" within a place surrounded by walls; if he runs against them he is the worse for it. But the moment must inevitably come when the writer as well as his readers would say: "If there were no walls the rider would not so continually knock against them. What's the use of talking about freedom as long as the walls are round the place?" And thus it happened that, when the scholastic philosopher had fought with a thousand subtle arguments for the truth of dogmatic docrine, and had announced its infallibility with never so triumphant a flourish—the acute reader in the end felt strongly that the result was far from unexceptionable—and without anybody desiring it, the authority of Reason was ever more clearly demonstrated. Thus it came to pass that scholasticism, whose end and aim had been to prove that all the doctrines of the Church were fully confirmed by logic, had just the contrary effect, for it served but to reinforce criticism and to discredit the dogmatic "walls"; freedom of investigation took root on its very basis, and the authority of the Church in all philosophic matters was entirely undermined.

The Church, however, had terrible weapons. It found a sword in the devout minds of the philosophers themselves. In their soul's anguish they grasped after desperate means of rescue. Many of them—Abélard and Roger Bacon, for instance—in the first half of their works rejected all authority, and allowed full play to the

exuberance of their own minds, only to conclude in the second half by re-establishing the authority of the Church by means of some bold sophism. Others had the happy idea of "twofold truth." They said, "This sentence is true from a theologian's point of view, false if considered from a philosopher's standpoint," or the reverse. Under this reservation were taught the Averroistic doctrines that the world and matter were of eternity and not created out of nothing, that God operated but in the first and remotest of the heavens and left the earth to the laws of nature, that Reason and the Soul were but one in all, and that therefore neither individual souls nor immortality of the individual soul was possible. They invariably added that all this was true only in philosophy, that, according to the Catholic faith, the creation out of nothing, the Lord's personal government of our world, the immortality of the soul were indubitably true. But the Church was not to be fooled. This method was forbidden and declared to be most damnable heresy, and many a professor rued his subtlety at the stake.

The authorship of such doctrines was attributed to Averroes, who of all Arabic philosophers became best known and most famous in Europe. He did not enjoy an equal fame among his countrymen, for he was but the last of a long line of brilliant writers, an eclectic on whose head the glory of his predecessors was shed, because it was he who transmitted their works to the Occident.

"There I saw him, who wrote the great commentary!" says Dante, who meets him among the great thinkers and poets in the Limbo. His true name and title were: "Kadi Abul Valid Mohamed Ibn Achmed Abu Mohamed Ibn Roschd"; Averroes is but a Latin corruption of the last

two words of his name. He was born in 1126 of a noble family in Cordova, and had been the favourite minister of several Khalifs, yet he died in disgrace in the year 1190, a victim of the great clerical movement in the Mohammedan world. Many of his writings were burnt in public places. His main work is but "a Latin translation of a Hebraic translation of a commentary on an Arabic translation of a Syriac translation of a Greek text of Aristotle" (Renan). "Averroism" was believed to be one of the worst and most damnable heresies.

But riders had already begun to take the walls. In the thirteenth century not only heresies of all kinds were widely spread, but pure scepticism itself was no rare phenomenon. The question whether Christ was an historical person or not was discussed with amazing coolness. Absolute unbelievers began to speak openly their opinions about the "impostor" Jesus and his disciples.

In the years 1270 and 1276 the following opinions among others were condemned at the University of Paris "Nothing is known because of theology," "The Christian religion is a hindrance to teaching," "Only philosophers are wise," "The sayings of theologians are founded on fables."

Thus philosophy was in opposition to the Church, and was itself divided by perpetual discords. It brought no solutions to the eternal questions which theology answered so promptly and decisively; to this day it stands as helplessly and wistfully before the same clouded door of the Unknown. The boldest ideas of thinkers are but springboards built out a little way over the ocean—man proceeds a step or two on them, looks down bewildered on the infinite waste of waters before him; a foreboding

of unknown immensities creeps over him, but at the next step he falls and arduously swimming regains the shore. The very words which he tries to explain and define, "God," "Creator," "Fate," "First Cause," "Soul," "Immortality," and a thousand others, are themselves unanswerable, incomprehensible, enigmatic signs—resembling tickets of entrance into a mystic garden, into which, in spite of them, we are not admitted. Only our presentiments and our longings lend them a meaning. We cannot forbear trying ever anew to investigate those alluring paths and longingly press our faces to the bars, but in vain, the door remains closed. With all our philosophy and our science we have not got one step nearer to-day than we were before, the only difference is that we have become more modest. Faith, which professes to be so modest and humble, is in reality the greatest of all presumptions, the pretension of knowing what we cannot and shall not know. But the huge certainty of higher conceptions, which dawns upon men of a higher stamp, has been left to us; a knowledge which does not need, which even scorns logic, and which we call intuition or primary knowledge. The greatest of our time, like Goethe or Emerson, are true believers, and smile just as Scotus Erigena smiled at logical philosophy, which after so terrible struggles has attained so little. One might even say that they rather share the mystic views of mediæval Realists than those of modern Rationalism. They will concede that Nominalism is reasonable, that it was most necessary, that it led to critical science, which within the limits allowed to mankind has had so brilliant and incontestable results. But for all beyond them we must needs rely on intuition, which gives no certainty beyond an overpowering consciousness of a higher intellect surround-

ing, all and about which we must cease to discuss. Consciously or not, they all have much in common with a mediæval school which in those times already turned with loathing from the debates of philosophy, the school of the mystics, who saw the only source of all knowledge in pure intuition, in the loving contemplation of God. In ecstatic trances, in perfect self-forgetfulness, in a bold imagery of allegoric figures, they expressed their meaning as poets do. There were Christian, Jewish, and Mohammedan mystics ; some even who kept aloof from all creeds alike, some who chose to stick to certain symbols, and others who abandoned themselves to the free flow of the poetical current in their minds. Between the words of the "Eagle of the Synagogue," Moses Maimonides, "Intuition means so high a degree of imagination, that a thing will appear to a man as vividly as if he saw it present and perceptible to his senses . . . and in such men we say dwells the spirit of the most-high God!" —or the words of Abul Khain, "All that Ibn Sina knows I see"; the sentence of St. Bernard, "Books and trees will teach thee what thou canst never hear from the masters of the school"; that of Vauvenargues, "All logical arguments have no other scope but to make the mind understand things with the same certainty which in the heart they have already"; the words of Emerson, "By being assimilated to the original soul by whom and after whom all things subsist, the soul of man does then easily flow into all things, and all things flow into it: they mix ; and he is present and sympathetic with their structure and law. This path is difficult, secret, and beset with terror. The ancients called it 'ecstasy' or absence"—between all these there is no real difference.

To this order Dante also belongs. He was influenced

in a high degree by the mystics of the Middle Ages, like the monks Hugh and Richard of St. Victor. In the Heaven of the Sun, where the lights of the school are united in eternal bliss, he is instructed by John of Fidanza —called St. Bonaventura—and Thomas of Aquino. But in a much higher place still, in the seventh heaven, are enthroned the purer spirits, who in life had already devoted themselves to contemplation, and the most powerful of all, St. Bernard, guides him upwards before the countenance and to the recognition of God. Thus Dante has made the men who, by their writings or by word of mouth, had been his masters on earth, his guides in his transcendental pilgrimage, which, if we get a deeper insight into it, is but a mystical reflection of his path through real life.

CHAPTER IX

THE UNIVERSITIES

In the tenth canto of Paradise, Dante, arriving in the fourth heaven, that of the Sun, is welcomed by sparkling lights, which, "rising in life and triumph" and with sweet melodies, wheel around him "three times in measure due." These are the blessed spirits of the great "Masters of the School," and one of these, Thomas of Aquino, makes him acquainted with the name of each. There Dante sees Gratian, the collector of the "Decretals" ("papal edicts"); Peter Lombard, the author of the "Sentences," which became the basis of all theological teaching in the Middle Ages; Isidore, Bede, Richard of St. Victor, Albertus Magnus, and many others; at the circle's end one unknown flame is still burning high, and St. Thomas proceeds:

> He from whom now to me turns thy regard
> Is of a soul the light so gravely wise,
> It deemed the way to death too slow and hard,
> There Sigier's light eternal meets thine eyes,
> Who, lecturing in the street that's named of straw
> Unpalatable truths did syllogise.

From the fact that Dante so specially mentions the Rue du Fouarre in Paris, where Master Sigier of Brabant used to lecture, it seems to follow that he himself had

heard him there. Balzac has founded his novel, "Les Proscrits," on these verses. Probably in his exile, as a man of maturer years, Dante visited the Universities of Bologna and Paris, perhaps that of Padua and others too, and it is likely that in some of them he was not only a hearer but also a lecturer. Many of the great scholastic writers used to lecture in the universities. The development of these high schools gave a new stamp to the era; these institutions, which are still of such importance in our intellectual life, also trace their origin to that memorable period.

Until the eleventh century no other schools had existed but those of convents and chapter-houses. The oldest university of all was that of Salerno, which at first had only contained a school of medicine. Soon Bologna and Paris surpassed it, the former becoming famous for its school of law, the latter the centre of scholastic science. Theology was taught above all, and the seven liberal arts, grammar, dialectics, rhetoric, mathematics, geometry, music, and astronomy. The essential feature of the new schools was not only the combination of so many different branches of learning in one institute, but more especially their secular character. For a long time still the majority of the teachers might indeed belong to the clergy, but the university itself was no longer a purely clerical institution.

The school of Salerno had received the "privilegium approbandi," that is, of conferring degrees on the students, from King Roger of Sicily; and Frederick II. prescribed a certain scheme of study for physicians, according to which they had to study philosophy for three years and then medicine for five. He founded the University of Naples, which was the first to which professors with

fixed salaries were appointed. But in general a school was endowed with no other subventions than privileges. The fees which the professors received from their hearers were so considerable that those in Bologna were in a position to purchase palaces and large estates. The towns, which derived great profits from the universities—ten thousand hearers annually flocked to Bologna—granted all kinds of privileges to them, and favourite professors were offered high salaries. The students or their "proctors" elected the rector, they were immune from the ordinary judges of the town, justice being dealt to them by their professors or by the bishop of the cathedral; they lived separated into "nations," and when the citizens raised the rent of lodgings to an enormous rate, special houses were founded for them to live in, which were called "colleges." Dissensions and riots among them, either between the different nationalities or between priests and laymen, still more often between students and citizens, were of frequent occurrence. In Oxford it even happened in the year 1347 that the students on one side, the masters with the bedells and servants on the other, stood in arms against one another and fought a pitched battle. The masters are said to have had the best of it.

The course of study necessary to obtain the degree of Doctor was generally lengthy. The students often were obliged to hear the so-called "trivium" (grammar, rhetorics, and philosophy) for eight or even for twelve years, and those who, after having gone through it, began to study theology might already lecture on philosophy. Besides the title of doctor, minor degrees, like that of a "master of arts" or "bachelor of letters," were also conferred. The lectures were given in the halls of convents

or in private houses, in the absence of benches the pupils were seated on bundles of straw. These lectures were scarcely ever extempore speeches, but always kept close to some well-known author's work, on which the lecturer commented, sentence for sentence, and word for word, until in the course of time the author was supplanted by the commentary, and the lecture became the commentary on a commentary, and so forth—a heap of casuistic notes, added to the notes which another man had uttered before. The students took down the lectures with great zeal, for books were costly, the owner of twenty volumes was proud of his library, and of a bookseller we are told that he had even full 114 works in his shop.

In every regard those schools and studies, though a splendid advance upon those of former times, were kept down and restrained by all the limits which a theological system is able to erect. Not life and nature were the basis of instruction and science, but books. Not the thing was the object of inquiry but the word; the method never consisted in experiments, but in dialectics, and the result was not established by any real proof or even by arguments, but by authority; and, finally, authority itself was backed only by the master's name, not by his knowledge. Cases occurred in which newly created doctors were made to swear that they would never teach anything new but would deliver everything as they had learned it themselves; from the very beginning of their career they had to renounce all intellectual independence and to remain for ever slaves to their master's authority.

The difference between modern and mediæval science, their study and methods, is nowhere expressed so clearly as in the dialogue between Mephistopheles and the pupil in Goethe's "Faust"; the verses,

Am besten ist's wenn Ihr nur einen hört
Und auf des Meisters Worte schwört,
Im Ganzen: haltet Euch an Worte
Dann geht Ihr durch die sichre Pforte
Zum Tempel der Gewissheit ein,

contain the whole malady of mediæval thinking, the over-estimation of words. That words are after all but conventional signs, like paper money, which never say all and very often say too much, which never quite answer to the thought which they are meant to express, or the thing they are to designate, all that was never so much as thought of in the Middle Ages. People even fancied an essential connection between words and things, not only a phonetic and psychological connection as it exists in reality. In the "Vita Nuova," Dante says, "Love indeed must be something of excellent nature, because the word 'love' is so sweet to hear, and this according to the written sentence, *Nomina sunt consequentia rerum* (Names are consequents of things)." Scholars wishing to explore the origin of crystal found that the word κρύσταλλος in Greek meant ice. Now it never struck them, that because of its resemblance to ice, the Greeks had called the crystal by the same name, but quite the contrary; from the resemblance of the words, people concluded that the nature of the things must needs be the same, and the explanation they gave was sure and short: "Crystal is no other but ice turned into stone, for it is designated by the same word." The following simile may serve to render this general mistake of mediæval science and thought still clearer. Imagine that all things in the world were put into a certain order, and their names written on little scrolls, which were stuck into the things, as it were, on pins. Now mediæval men firmly believed that whenever

they had changed the names, that is, whenever they had put the scroll on which the word was written into another place, the thing had changed its place too. And million-fold Nature, which never is to be exhausted by words—all our speech being but a distant allusion to it—was thus forced into a small number of forms. That is the reason why the return of experimental science in the sixteenth century, which was indeed a return to nature, brought with it such a revolution and blew all the philosophic card-castles of the Middle Ages into pieces.

Desultory as this survey is, we may picture to ourselves the mediæval masters and their hearers dictating and copying for long years, brooding over commentaries, dissolving a minimum of scientific facts in an ocean of words, revelling in words, and on sophisms and quotations arranging glorious debates. And yet we are not to forget that, under mountains of babble and scholastic jargon, a few grand and bold currents of the human mind streamed on in their hidden course.

CHAPTER X

THE PROVENÇALS

In the tenth and eleventh centuries, before Italy took the lead, France gave the "tone" in Europe. It was the birthplace of chivalry.* Paris was the centre of mediæval philosophy; the Romantic style in architecture, which we call "Gothic," had its origin there, and it was the home of Romantic poetry. The French language was spread far beyond the borders of France, and French novels of chivalry were read and imitated all over Europe. Brunetto Latini wrote his "Tresor" in French "porce que la parleure est plus delitable et plus comune a toutes gentes." In England as well as in the Western parts of Germany, in the South of Italy, and at the Court of the Latin Empire in Constantinople, the French tongue—the language of "oil"—was read and spoken, and the language of Southern France—that of "oc"—was scarcely less diffused; for mediæval France was divided into two separate countries, of marked difference in language, culture and distinct political existence. Only the North formed the kingdom of France, the South Provençal States in part belonged to the empire, as Burgundy and Arles, while the rest, Poitou, Maine, Aquitaine, though vassal states of the

* The expressions of chivalrous life, of customs, arms, tournaments, &c., were almost all French throughout Europe.

French crown, were dominions of the kings of England. Here, in Southern France, for the first time since the fall of antiquity, the revival of civilisation took place. Here, earlier than anywhere else, was seen a country happy in peaceful development; rich towns and a powerful feudal nobility for a short time flourished side by side. It was there that chivalry matured its finest flower, finding its ideals not only in adventurous brawls and wild warfare, but in fine manners and in art. Much of this was owing to the influence of the civilised Moorish kings of Spain, with which the Provençals lived in peaceful as well as in warlike intercourse.* It was a fruitful, beautiful land, with wealthy little town-republics situated along rivers winding through rich cornfields and vineyards, and small states of feudal princes, the lords of many a stately castle, where their princely courts were the seats of gentle hospitality, of chivalrous splendour, of poetry and joy. It was there that women, who had been abased by the monkish views of life, first recovered a position in society, and with them instantly a more graceful tone began to reign in social intercourse, in the pleasures of love and in literature.

This important change, which soon spread all over chivalrous Europe, and led to that cult of women which in

* It cannot be said often enough that civilisation in the Saracen countries was a much higher one in those times; that architecture, science, chivalry and minstrelsy had reached a high standard in those countries, when in Christian Europe they were still rude and undeveloped. If the state of to-day has become the reverse, if Mussulmans have degenerated and Europeans become the pioneers of progress and culture, the reason of this is to be found in the fact that in the interior of both mediæval worlds the same struggle was fought, but with a very different result. In the Orient, philosophy and science were exterminated by the Mohammedan clergy, in Europe revolutionary criticism was victorious in spite of all the resistance of the Church.

the end became a characteristic and indispensable feature of all chivalry, soon found its expression in the costumes too. Once more mankind became conscious of the perfections with which creation has endowed it; once more, since the fall of the antique ideal, men began to feel pride and joy in the beauty of their bodies; their costume, which in the previous centuries had resembled sacks, and had but served to hide the forms of the human body as much as possible, again began to be modelled on them; women's robes were made with a waist, they fell in beautiful folds and ended in long trains. The hair was allowed to fall in natural curls, its favourite ornament being a wreath of natural or artificial flowers, or the "cappello," that is, a small ribbon of gold or silk. Great ladies wore pearls.

The clergy, of course, soon turned against this "immoral dress," and forbade it in several councils. Brother Salimbene writes: "Cardinal Latinus, the Pope's legate in Tuscany, put all women into a state of great distress by forbidding them to wear trains. Otherwise they should have no absolution; and a woman told me that she preferred the train to all other garments she wore upon herself. Besides, the Cardinal gave order that all women, maidens, ladies, married women as well as widows and matrons, should wear veils over their faces, and that was horribly distasteful to them. But against that plague they found means which they in no wise could find for trains, for they wore veils of silk and byssus, interwoven with golden threads, in which they looked ten times better, and still more effectually seduced the eyes of those who saw them." Against this utterance of the reactionary monk we may well quote the words of a Provençal knight, Guillem de Montagnagout, who said: "If a woman does nothing worse, nor show pride or insolence, she will not

violate the love of God by her finery. Nobody who behaves in a godly way will sway from the Lord's path by means of a fair dress, just as nobody will ever gain His grace by a black robe and a white hood." The point in the last sentence is not to be misunderstood. Indeed, the hierarchy in Provence had lost all influence, nowhere did its doctrines encounter so much scepticism and scorn. Two tendencies had become the ruling ones in the country, one leading away from asceticism to epicurean enjoyment and gladsome pleasure; this was the tendency of the cheerful, of the bold, and of the frivolous; the other, that of the religious, turned with loathing from the corruption of the clergy, and aspired to a much severer asceticism than that demanded by the Catholic Church, to an asceticism which required perfect purity as well as absolute poverty, and even led to a total abnegation of life and to suicide by starvation—the severe doctrines of the Albigensians and Waldensians. Thus the clergy had lost all importance; the nation had thrown off all respect for Rome. Priests were despised and hated; the songs of the troubadours are full of abuse of the clergy. "I had rather be a Jew than a clergyman," says Guillem de Puy-Laurent; and "viler than a priest" had become a proverbial expression. It came to pass that clergymen were obliged to disguise their dress and hide their tonsure to avoid being ill-treated.

But what is singularly interesting to us is the literature of the country. The Provençal tongue was the oldest of all Romance tongues and its poetry the "oldest romantic poetry" (Diez). It was the first poetry of a civilised European nation since the fall of the antique, and it developed unbiased by any antique influence; the themes which the poets liked to treat, their forms and the way

in which they looked on life, were quite different and new. Their homage to women, their notion of love, the chivalrous ideal were all perfectly new features. The second civilisation of Europe had begun.

In the early Middle Ages the only representative of poetry had been the jongleur or ballad-monger, who went strolling through the villages, and often combined his profession with that of a rope-dancer, who passed his hat to collect small coins after his performance, and was not essentially different from his brethren of to-day. In his place now appeared the troubadour, the cultured poet, conscious of his position and proud of his art. There were troubadours of every class and origin—some born among the lowest orders, who attained high positions, like Bernart de Ventadour ; troubadours who by birth were citizens, like Peire of Auvergne and Aimeric of Peguilhan ; others who were knights, for instance, Bertrand de Born, Rambaut de Vaqueiras, and many more; poets of princely rank, the Count of Orange, Prince Rudel of Blaya, the kings Richard of England and Alfonso II. of Aragon. They all were proud of belonging to *one* class of poets ; now it is a sign of high mental development if talent has the power of levelling such enormous differences of rank and birth. Those who were not princes themselves generally belonged to a prince's suite. It was often their official duty to praise the lady of their lord in their songs. Often, too, they travelled alone and independent from one castle to another, welcomed and hospitably received everywhere, at the Courts of Auvergne, Beziers, Toulouse, Orange, Montferrat, and all the other little capitals of princes and castles of noblemen. Some of them kept jongleurs to accompany them on their way and recite their songs, others were both poet and singer. Feasts and tournaments were the centres

of this chivalrous and graceful life. We may read of a famous feast celebrated in Treviso in the year 1214, when a wooden fortress, covered with carpets, was defended by two hundred ladies against the attack of a great number of knights, fruits, flowers, sweets and bottles of perfume being the projectiles.*

The songs of the troubadours were always composed for music; their forms were complicated and various, known as the "canzon," the "tenzon," the "sirventes," and many others; the versification of the stanzas had to be as artful as possible, and the poets vied in what were called "difficult rhymes." This was quite suited to the Provençal language, and indeed a consequence of there being more rhymes possible in it than in any other. On the whole, this poetry wearies by endless repetitions of the same thoughts, images and sentiments; the poetry of the German Minnesingers seems very much superior to that of the Provençal knights. Every song of Walther von der Vogelweide contains a new thought, paints a new situation and expresses new shades of feeling. And everywhere in his songs we are attracted by a depth of feeling, and a most personal way of expressing it, which is wanting in the works of most of the Provençal poets. All these poets sang of love, but their love generally was a formal and official homage to a lady whom they were in duty bound to praise, and their poems therefore were rather cool and conventional. Of course there were men of living blood and real passion among them, and love-affairs, the heroes of which were very much in earnest, tragedies of separation, jealousy and death were not uncommon. One of the most ingenious and tender was Bernard de Ventadour,

* The existence of the famous "courts of love" has never been historically proved.

who was born in the second half of the twelfth century, the son of a poor serf, in the castle of Eblis II., Viscount of Ventadour. He was forced to leave the castle in consequence of his having been too much in earnest in praising his lord's wife, the Lady Agnes de Montluçon, and thereby having won her love. Later on he stayed at the Court of the Count of Toulouse, and at last died a monk in the convent of Dalon, in the Limousin.

Very different from all these was Bertrand de Born, the most fiery singer of them all, whose songs, as Diez said, betray the half-savage, warlike and bloodthirsty baron of the twelfth century.

There is a particular charm and lustre shed on the person of Bertrand de Born. Queens loved him and modern poets have sung his praise. A wild energy pervades all his poetry. He resembles Lord Byron in the fact of his powerful temper being the source of his originality.

It is he of whom Heine sang, that "he could conquer every heart, that his sweet melodies allured the lioness of the Plantagenets, then her daughter, then her sons, and finally King Henry himself, whose anger melted into tears when he heard the lovely accents of Bertrand de Born, the troubadour!"

It is he of whom Uhland said:

> "For his love's sake royal children
> Did their father's anger bear."

Therefore Dante sees him in the pits of hell, holding his own severed head like a lanthorn, to light his way through the dark den. In his book "Of Eloquence in the Vernacular Language" Dante calls him the singer of arms, and praises him as the third after Guiraut de Borneil and Arnaut Daniel. It is to the latter that he attributes the highest place

in Provençal poetry. He calls him the man who left none unconquered in love-song and romance, and those who do not praise him he calls fools. Here we may once more see how separated from critical discernment the productive talent may be. To us Arnaut seems to be a most insipid author, whose songs are purposely obscure and complicated, and as full of artificiality as devoid of melody. He is deficient in all in which Dante himself excels. It has been alleged that he wrote a romance, "Lancelot," which is said to have been the book by which Paolo and Francesca were seduced. If this be true, it might explain the great honour in which he was held by his contemporaries. Dante in his book calls him "the first among the singers of love," and Petrarca likewise celebrates him as the "great master of love."

There are still many more poets deserving to be quoted here; the deepest and boldest of all perhaps was Peire Cardinal, who addressed a powerful "poem of blame" to the Creator himself; then the gay and adventurous Count of Poitiers, Richard Lionheart, whose song in captivity is well known; but Dante seems to have been influenced rather by the average Provençal poetry than by the more original and striking specimens. There are places in his works which incline one to believe that they are simply imitations of Provençal verses. He probably wrote Provençal poems himself; some Provençal verses of his are still extant.* For the language of Oc was not confined to the South of France, but spread all over the Courts of Northern Spain and Italy. At Montferrat, Ferrara, Florence, Malta and in Sicily, Provençal poets composed

* In the last circle of Purgatory, where the sin of carnal lust is repented, Dante, among many other poets, meets Arnaut, who answers him in Provençal verses.

their lays, and many troubadours were born Italians, who yet sung and wrote in Provençal only; Zorgi of Venice, the Genoese Bonifacio Calvo, Frederick II.'s son Manfred, and, above all, Sordello of Mantua, on whose head Dante's famous verses have shed a lustre which has remained as brilliant as unexplained, and which inspired the greatest of modern English poets in the most mysterious of his works.

Another troubadour who lived in Italy at the Court of the Marquis Boniface of Montferrat was Rambaut of Vacqueiras, of whom some very characteristic letters have been preserved. One of them runs thus:

"Glorious Marquis, I will not relate all the beautiful deeds we performed together from the very beginning, for I fear people would misrepresent it. The first endeavour of a youth must be to excel, if he would gain fame and honour, as you have done, my lord, who excelled from the very beginning, so that you and I were praised, you as a lord and I as your knight. Now, oh my lord, because it is hard to lose or to forget a friend whom one should keep in honour, I will refresh our love and recall to your mind how we carried off the lady Seldina of Mar from the Marquis of Malaspina out of the very midst of his entrenchments and how you gave her to Posson of Anguilar, who lay dying of love for her.

"Remember, my lord, how at Montalto the minstrel Aimonet brought news to you of Jacobina, whom they wanted to carry to Sardinia by force to marry against her will; how you heard that with sighing, and how she kissed you in parting and implored you so pitifully to protect her from her rapacious uncle. You instantly ordered five of your best knaves to mount, and after

supper at the fall of night we set out and rode away, you, Guiet, Hugonet d'Alfar, and Bertaldon, who was our guide, and I myself, for I will not pass myself in silence. I took her in the port in the very moment they tried to embark her; a great clamour arose on the shore and from the sea, behind us they rushed afoot and on horseback, we rode on and were sure of escaping, when suddenly the Pisans fell on us. On seeing so many horsemen, so many beautiful harnesses, so many glittering helmets and floating banners barring our way, there was no need to ask whether we were afraid. You selected a hiding-place between Benc (Albenga) and Final. We could hear the bugles and clarions sounding from many sides and the cries of war. Full two days we staid without food or drink, finally on the third we went on, and in the pass of Belestar were met by twelve robbers going out on plunder. Then we did not know what to do, for we could not use our horses. I, however, rushed in among them on foot. It is true I was wounded by a lance piercing my collaret, but I wounded three or four of them, so that they were forced to retire. Bertaldon and Hugonet seeing that I was wounded came to my rescue, and when we were three of us we swept the pass clear of robbers, so that you could ride through it in security. What a gay supper we had after this, though we had but a loaf of bread, and could not drink, not even wash! In the evening we arrived at Nice in Puiclair's castle; he received us most courteously, oh, he would have made his fair daughter your bed-fellow if you had accepted it. On the next morning you, as a lord and baron, rewarded your host in a regal manner; you gave Aigleta to Guido of Montelimar and had Jacobina wedded to Anselmet, she had the county of Ventimiglia restored

to her, which by her brother's death was hers by right in spite of her uncle's claims.

"To recall all the glorious deeds I saw you perform would mean to tire us both, myself with relating and you with listening. More than a hundred girls I saw you marry to counts, marquises, and powerful barons, and never did the fire of youth seduce you to sin with one of them, though they were quite bereft and unprotected. A hundred knights I saw equipped by you and a hundred others expelled and banished, you always exalted the good and humbled the bad, no flatterer could ever make you proud; I saw you console many widows, assist so many unhappy persons, that you certainly must have earned the glories of Paradise if it is to be won by largess, for you always did act generously and never refused any one who was worthy of your generosity. Alexander bequeathed you his great heart, Roland and the twelve Peers their bravery, the noble Berart his graceful behaviour. In your courts everything graceful is to be found: liberality and courtesy to women, beautiful dresses and fine armour, trumpets, games, violins, and songs; you kept no porters when you sat down to eat. I too, my lord, may boast of having lived at your court, and having well known how to behave, to give and to suffer, to serve and to be silent; never did I cause displeasure to anybody. Nobody can reproach me with ever having swerved from your side in war nor fearing death where your honour was at stake, nor did I ever hinder you in any noble deed. To me, therefore, who know so much about your affairs, you should be doubly kind; that would be but just, for in me you find a witness, a knight and a court poet, my most glorious marquis."

This knightly begging-letter was written about the year

1200—two generations before Dante was born. It was the time of the fourth Crusade, the time of chivalrous adventures, of chivalrous civilisation, which was so neatly defined by Lamprecht in the words: "It was a culture not founded on knowing things, but on the art of doing things." By Dante's time all this had passed away. The joyful spirit which breathed in the institution of chivalry, and which in its inmost nature made it hostile to the Church, was the cause of its ruin. Europe had already threatened to emancipate itself from the Church. The human intellect as well as the spirit of life everywhere had risen against her yoke. But still her power was formidable. Innocent III. preached a crusade against the Provençals, and the incipient fire was extinguished with merciless atrocity. In the Albigensian wars the civilisation of Provence was destroyed. In a similar though less bloody way chivalry in Germany succumbed to the monkish movement. With it fell minstrelsy and its literature; though for a long time Provençal poems continued to be written and composed, its spirit was broken; German "Minnesang" decayed to the bloodless "Meistersang" of citizens. Only in Italy the development was different. Here the civilisation of cities rose to a still more brilliant height than chivalrous culture had ever attained. Dante himself was born in the happy moment of the change: the knightly nobility had become a knightly class of patrician citizens, its castles were now fortified and turreted palaces which looked over the streets of cities no less dark and threateningly than they had done from the rocks, but to the art of doing had been added that of knowing, to graceful deportment and minstrelsy an intense love of freedom and public spirit.

CHAPTER XI

ITALIAN POETRY

ITALIAN literature was later than any other in developing, In Italy the Latin language had been the common vernacular tongue, and for a long time was believed to be the only idiom fit for the use of cultured people. It had been long dead ere men became aware of the fact. It had long been corrupted or altered by daily use and the influence of foreign races; in very early Latin documents we encounter here and there words, probably due to a slip of the clerk's pen, that bear all the characteristic signs of the Romance languages, the wearing-down of terminations, declension by means of prepositions, conjugation by means of auxiliary verbs, constructions of which faint traces only are found in Latin; though it is certain that long before the thirteenth century, to which the oldest specimens of Italian literature may be assigned, Italian dialects were spoken by the people. Dante, therefore, designates the Italian language always as the "vulgar" or vernacular language, that of the common people; while inflected Latin still seemed to him the real mother-tongue of the land, the far more dignified idiom of scholars and cultivated persons.

In Italy, too, a mediæval literature in Latin had not been wanting; there were poetical tales and songs, countless works of a moral and allegoric character, legends and mys-

teries, and a great number of chronicles developing from the rudest notes in the ninth century to the naïve masterpiece of Brother Salimbene of Parma. Besides, there was a rich lyrical poetry, religious hymns, as well as the merry songs of the "Goliards," the spirit of which was just the contrary, and hostile to the Church. Remnants of both still exist in hymns as well as in students' and drinking songs.

When, in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the desire for a poetry in a living tongue made itself felt in Italy, French and Provençal were the languages which poets thought fit for their compositions, and it took a long time before the living treasury of their own melodious tongue was discovered by the "cultivated" classes. Its earliest beginnings are rustic poems in provincial dialects, the oldest of them probably much older than any which have come down to our own time.

Then poets at the Court of Sicily began to imitate the chivalrous poetry of the Provençal troubadours; the results were artificial and bloodless love-songs, which decayed with the fall of the Hohenstaufens and of chivalry before they had blossomed into any living flower. Yet, arising from the deep poetic impulse of the people, popular poems were composed in the South and in Central Italy, utterances of real life which were not inspired by foreign models.

Chivalrous poetry continued to be written in Central Italy for some time even after the fall of the Hohenstaufens. Then the stronger life of the people and of the citizens superseded it and found its utterance in songs of peasant life, rude, sensual, and humorous, by unknown authors, until Cecco Angiolieri of Siena strikes our notice. We know but little about him, hardly twenty of his poems are

extant, but his profile is sharply outlined against the background of the period. He was as dissipated as he was gifted and original, a bitter enemy of Dante, against whom he wrote a number of insulting poems. Woman, wine and dice were his themes, and he composed wilder and truer love-songs on his sweetheart, a shoemaker's daughter, than any of the Italian knights ever could have written. Compare verses like the following:

> The man who feels not, more or less, somewhat
> Of love in all the years his life goes round
> Should be denied a grave in holy ground,
> Except with usurers who will bate no groat.*

He hated his parents, and composed poems of exultation on his father's death. A most remarkable sonnet is the following:

> If I were fire, I'd burn the world away;
> If I were wind, I'd turn my storms thereon;
> If I were water, I'd soon let it drown;
> If I were God, I'd sink it from the day;
> If I were Pope, I'd never feel quite gay
> Until there was no peace beneath the sun;
> If I were Emperor, what would I have done?
> I'd lop men's heads all round in my own way.
> If I were Death, I'd look my father up;
> If I were Life, I'd run away from him,
> And treat my mother to like calls and runs.
> If I were Cecco (and that's all my hope),
> I'd pick the nicest girls to suit my whim,
> And other folks should get the ugly ones.*

A certain despair of a dissolute soul betrays itself in the songs. He most certainly carried within him the deep sorrow which has made so many humorists the truest

* Translated by Dante Gabriel Rossetti.

poets of pain. Humour, as Heine said, "has a laughing tear in its coat of arms." Who, in reading the sorrowful verses of that grimly gay poet,

> My heart is heavy with a hundred things
> That I would die a hundred times a day,

is not vividly reminded of the famous verses of Lord Byron:

> And if I laugh at any mortal thing,
> 'Tis that I may not weep . . .

Arrived at this juncture the current of Italian poetry divided, and while one branch was pursuing its rude and popular course, the other strove upwards to supernatural regions.

Chivalrous poetry became ever less sensual and more elevated; religious and philosophic ideas were interwoven with it, and even scholasticism did not remain without influence on it. But the essential feature was the position of woman and the new conception which poets had of love. To the ancient world love had meant nothing but the physical relations between the two sexes. Woman was simply woman, being considered neither high nor ethereal nor yet distinctly base. Her social inferiority was but natural in times where physical strength and ability for self-defence were such essential conditions of power. With the beginning of the Middle Ages two opinions, at war with each other, began to prevail. In the Germanic mind a certain reverential regard for women was deeply rooted which had been quite foreign to antiquity. The social position of women often was far from corresponding to this reverence, but from the very oldest specimens of Germanic poetry a different idea of

the female and a warmer feeling about love and conjugal life is evident. On the other side, the Christian doctrine of the early Middle Ages, entirely imbued with monkish ideas, regarded woman as something bad and unclean, and condemned all sensual love in the same way. At the bottom of this movement a deep and highly interesting phenomenon in the psychology of nations might be traced, for it looks as if the unchecked profligacy of the orientalised ancient world had led to surfeit and disgust, and, as ever, man, as the stronger and more brutal party, made woman, as the weaker one, suffer under the abasement which he perhaps felt most keenly. All this, combined with the general brutality of the period, explains how, in the early centuries of the Middle Ages, a love-poetry which would deserve the name was still more impossible than in ancient times. Moreover—and this is a further proof of the rudeness and utter want of civilisation of the period—we are unable to discover the existence of one noble and imposing woman in its history.

All this was changed with the era of chivalry. Then was introduced the cult of women, which, however feigned and superficial it may be, has become a leading feature of modern civilisation. Love in the modern sense, as it still dominates our life or at least our literature, was discovered or invented. To this day "chivalrous" is the word to designate a perfect behaviour towards women.

In Provençal, German, and all knightly poetry woman was deified and raised to the stars, a flattery which soon became as exaggerated and conventional as the abuse of the monkish times had been. We may find the same worship to this day in the love-poems of all nations, the style of which is still derived from and indebted to the romantic literature of the Middle Ages.

But what I should like to call the spiritual school of Italian poetry goes much farther. Its sentiment as well as its expression was tinted with a mystic and religious colour. The beloved woman was indeed deified; she became the symbol of all that is high and beautiful, and the poet did not mean that as a mere compliment, as did the Provençal knight. His ecstatic mind saw her really so. The love which he felt for the woman appeared to him like an image of divine love, the love that pervades the universe; it became spiritualised and platonic in that high sense in which Plato really meant it. This poetry is soft, sweet and mystical, full of enthusiasm and secrecy, as remote from the sensual love-poetry of Ariosto or Swinburne as from the sentimental lays of the Provençal, which, were they expressions of genuine feelings or conventional, did but exaggerate, but never symbolise.

The "dolce stil nuovo," the "sweet new style," as Dante calls this poetry, was created by Guido Guinicelli of the noble family of the Principi in Bologna, but it found its true development in Tuscany. Dante himself calls Guinicelli "his sweet master." He repeatedly quotes him in his works, and some of Dante's finest verses are imitations of Guido's. About his life we know little more than that he was banished from Bologna in the year 1274 and died in 1276.

His celebrated canzone on the origin of love—a favourite subject of the time—might be called a manifesto of the new school:

Within the gentle heart love shelters him
As birds within the green shade of a grove;
Before the gentle heart, in nature's scheme
Love was not, nor the gentle heart, ere Love . . .
The fire of Love comes to the gentle heart

Like as its virtue to a precious stone . . .
As light sprang with the sun immediately . . .
Thus woman, like a star, enamoureth
The pure and gentle heart.

Even as the spirit of God is poured from heaven to move us, so the noble face of a woman may move us.

"How darest thou," God shall ask my soul when it stands before His judgment-seat, "to make Me of vain love similitude?"

Then may I plead, "As though from Thee he came,
Love wore an angel's face:
Lord, if I loved her, count it not my shame!"*

This is the love which makes the man who feels it virtuous and pure, an ecstatic love, from the source of which sprang a wonderful poetry, and which finally loses itself in sensitive morbidness.

To the Florentine poets of this new school belonged Lapo Gianni and Dino Frescobaldi, the melancholy Gianni Alfani, and Guido Orlandi. But the greatest of them are Guido Cavalcanti, Cino de' Sinibuldi da Pistoja, and, in his youthful poems, Dante himself. They were all acquainted and exchanged sonnets with one another, many of which are still extant. These sonnets, which sometimes run on a philosophic question, and again on a love affair, and often contain controversies now of a sportive and sometimes of a very embittered character, throw much light on the social life of these young poets, who emphatically called their style the "modern" style. Guido Orlandi in particular, who was the least gifted of all, often sharply rebuked the others in his sonnets. Whether Dante ever answered him we know not. But

* Translated by D. G. Rossetti.

among Guido Cavalcanti's sonnets there is one written against him, full of the proud contempt which that proudest nobleman of Florence knew well how to express :

Di vil matera mi conven far verso
(On a vile theme I needs must write a verse).

Guido Cavalcanti is the only one whose portrait is somewhat familiar to us. All the rest are but shadows. He played an important part in the town's history, and novelists and historians have tried to paint his personality in sharp and expressive terms. In the kind and loving words which Dante devoted to this dearest friend of his youth, and in his own poems, his character appears as through a mist. Though sometimes spoiled by dry scholastic subtleties, of which, owing to a contemporary freak of bad taste, even Dante was not quite free, his poems contain passionate and beautiful passages, which certainly inspired some of the finest verses in the "Vita Nuova" :

Who is she, coming, whom all gaze upon,
Who makes the air all tremulous with light,
And at whose side is Love himself, that none
Dare speak but each man's sighs are infinite ! *

He was a politician and a troubadour, who lived and sang his love affairs in Florence and Toulouse ; a proud and gifted man, like many others. Softer, sweeter and more sensuous are the sonnets of Cino da Pistoja, who of them all has left us the greatest number of poems, almost three hundred :

I was upon the high and blessed mount,
And kissed, long worshipping, the stones and grass,

* Translated by D. G. Rossetti.

There on the hard stones prostrate, where, alas!
That pure one laid her forehead in the ground.
Then were the springs of gladness sealed and bound,
The day that unto Death's most bitter pass
My sick heart's lady turned her feet, who was
Already in her gracious life renown'd.
So in the place I spake to Love, and cried:
"O sweet my God, I am one whom Death may claim
Hence to be his; for lo! my heart lies here."
Anon, because my Master lent no ear,
Departing still I called Selvaggia's name.
So with my moan I left the mountain-side.*

That the pains of lost or unsuccessful love play a great part in the poems of these sensitive bards cannot be surprising. They often call themselves the visible images of death, they bewail the day on which they were born, and complain that the world's joys are not for them, that only sorrow and melancholy fell to their lot. Longing for death is the motive of countless of these poems, yet sometimes all this wailing changes into natural anger at its natural cause, as in the following poem of Cino:

My curse be on the day when first I saw
  The brightness in those treacherous eyes of thine,
The hour when from my heart thou cam'st to draw
  My soul away, that both might fail and pine:
  My curse be on the skill that smooth'd each line
Of my vain songs,—the music and just law
  Of art, by which it was my dear design
That the whole world should yield thee love and awe,
Yea, let me curse mine own obduracy,
    Which firmly holds what doth itself confound—
  To wit, thy fair perverted face of scorn:
    For whose sake Love is oftentimes forsworn
So that men mock at him; but most at me
    Who would hold Fortune's wheel and turn it round.*

* Translated by D. G. Rossetti.

But notes of such unfeigned and natural feeling are rare. The ecstasy of love is the characteristic feature of the new school of poetry. The form of the beloved one becomes ever more mysterious, she is an angelic creature which has just descended from heaven. She astonishes all the world. Love herself has crowned her with all perfections; whosoever sees her becomes humble, to whomsoever she speaks he becomes pure of sin. This poetry abounds in personifications of all kinds: of the soul, the heart, of sighs, of love. A thousand little spirits appear in the poems. A spirit of love flies from the woman's lips, the spirit of the sigh rises to heaven, the spirits of sight are expelled from their place. . . . Carefully examined they often betray a sharp observation of psychic phenomena in the poet's own soul, which are but disguised by these truly mediæval figures. All these poems are preludes to the "Vita Nuova," and help to explain that wonderful little book, in which all the aforesaid elements reappear, still more refined and irradiated by the great and ingenuous soul of Alighieri with a solemn and individual light.

This poetry was an offspring of chivalrous "Minnesong," developed by the influence of scholasticism and the religious movement. On Dante himself these two elements, the science of the time and its religious tendencies, had such a powerful influence that they soon led him out of this school of Florentine poets to that solitary summit which he alone reached, and to the work in which flaming love, the supreme religious trance, and severest, coldest philosophy are united in the most faultless and yet most personal work of art which has ever been created by man.

CHAPTER XII

THE FRANCISCANS

In a time when religion and religious feelings occupied so large a part of men's lives and souls they could not fail to find expression in poetry. Mention has been made of the religious poetry in Latin; from the thirteenth century religious poetry was composed in the vernacular tongue also: songs of praise, ecclesiastical stories, moral plays and didactic poems and, above all, descriptions of Paradise and Hell—effectual means of impressing and fortifying devout minds.

In the thirteenth century, the time of revolution and general fermentation, religious life also underwent a change. Ever since the degeneration of Christendom from a pure message of love to a theological system, since the apostolate had frozen to an hierarchy, complaints about the worldliness of the Church and demands for reform and a return to the original state had never ceased among the people. All the severe monastic orders, the foundations of Cluny, of Citeaux, of the Chartreuse, had been but attempts to effect this. But the convents had decayed in their turn, and as to the life of the secular clergy, Archbishop Christian of Mainz boasted of having broken the heads of thirty men in one battle with his mace. Unceasing complaints were heard from all countries

against the greedy covetousness of prelates, in the pamphlets of indignant authors as well as in the assemblies of the nobility and in the parliaments of the people. In the year 1409 the revenue of the clergy in England was twelve times greater than that of the rest of the people; half of the land was property of the Church, to the Church were paid five times as many taxes as to the king: the House of Commons in that year strongly advised the king to confiscate all clerical possessions in the kingdom. Among other things, the House complained of no less than a hundred murderers in clerical orders living secure and free from fear of punishment in the asylum of the Church.

A ferocious satire in Latin of a much earlier date, the twelfth century, is cited by Bartoli. It is called the "Evangelium secundum Marcas Argenti." "Here beginneth the Gospel according to the Marks of Silver. In those days spake the Lord Pope unto the Romans: If the Son of Man come to the throne of our Majesty, say ye to him first: Friend, wherefore art thou come? But if he persist in knocking at the door and give you nothing, then hurl him into utter darkness! And it came to pass, that a poor priest approached the Court of the Lord Pope and cried: 'Have ye at least mercy on me, ye ushers of the Pope's door, for the hand of poverty is upon me! I am poor and therefore I pray, help me in my misery!' But they, when they heard him, were very wroth and spake: 'Friend, thy poverty perish with thee. Get thee hence, Satan, because thou knowest not what wisdom is in Numbers. Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Thou shalt not enter into the joy of thy Lord ere thou hast given unto him thine uttermost farthing.' The poor man went away and sold his mantle and his coat,

and all that he had, and gave it unto the cardinals and the chamberlains and the ushers of the door. But they said: 'What is that among so many?' and cast him out of the palace before the door; and there he sat and wept bitterly and found no comfort. But soon after this there came to the Court a rich clergyman, thick, fat, and bloated, who had killed a man in a brawl. And he gave first unto the ushers at the door, and thereafter he gave unto the chamberlains and thereafter unto the cardinals. But when the Lord Pope heard that the cardinals and the servants had received most, he was sore vexed and fell sick and was near death. But the rich man sent him an electuary made of gold and silver and he was healed in the self-same hour. And the Lord Pope summoned the cardinals and the servants and spake unto them: 'O my brethren, see that no one tempt you by vain words, but do ye after my example, so that as I take ye take also.'"

In the third part of the eighth circle of hell, Dante, in the "iron-hued rocks," sees countless round holes, out of the mouth of which burning and writhing feet appear. In these fiery pits stand, with heads downward, the souls of those who sold spiritual graces and dignities. Dante, on recognising one of them, Pope Nicolas III. of the House of Orsini, by a question of the latter, breaks out in verses of bitter indignation:

> Tell me, I pray thee, what great sum to bring
>
> Our Lord bade Peter ere he would confide
> The sacred keys into his custody.
> Truly no more than "Follow me," he cried . . .
>
> Therefore stay here; thou righteously art pained;
> And keep thou well thy money basely earned,
> Which thee to boldness against Charles constrained,

And were it not I have not quite unlearned
My awe and reverence for those keys supreme,
Which by thy hands in yon glad life were turned,
I would use words that harsher far would seem,
Because your avarice fills the world with woe,
Crushing the good and those of vile esteem

Upraising. You the Evangelist did show
Ye shepherds, when the harlot he displayed,
Who, by the streams, doth kings as lovers know . . .

Silver and gold are now made gods by you,
And what divides you from the Paynim wild?
Ye worship hundreds, he to one is true!

Ah! Constantine, what evil came as child
Not of thy change of creed, but of the dower
Of which the first rich father thee beguiled! *

In all countries a strong movement had arisen against the clergy, manifesting itself not only in the combat of the States against the Church and in the foundation of countless heretical sects, but above all in the intellectual life of the people, in the invective songs of poets, and in the increasing number of freethinkers and absolute unbelievers. It is, however, no unusual phenomenon that two combating parties are moved by the same tendencies. Very often the movement even transfers itself from one party to the opposite one. Thus, for instance, reformation and counter-reformation, Protestantism and Catholic reaction, which fought so bitter a struggle against one another, were but phenomena of the same great movement of religious reform which in different races and countries necessarily led to different results. It is a fact

* Translated by Dean Plumptre.

which never will be understood by partisans, but it is true notwithstanding.

Thus the reforming movement of the thirteenth century too, aspiring to a thorough purification of the Church and the re-establishment of original and primitive Christendom, had taken possession of the minds of Churchmen, who never thought of breaking her hierarchic rules, as well as of heretics, who did not hesitate to make themselves independent of her. Those who differed but in the choice of their paths, not of their aim, were most bitterly opposed to one another, and carried the religious fight to extermination.

Dante, in the 12th canto of Paradise, is told :

The host of Christ so dearly resupplied
With armour, in the rear of its high sign
Was following, few and slow, by doubt sore tried.

When the great emperor of the realm divine
Was moved for that imperilled band to care
Not for its merits, but through grace benign ;

And help, as I have said, to his spouse bare
By those two champions, through whose words and deeds
The scattered people homeward 'gan repair.

. . . . . .

The soul of one with love seraphic glowed ;
The other by his wisdom on our earth
A splendour of cherubic glory showed

Of one I'll speak ; for, if we tell the worth
Of one, 'tis true of both, whiche'er we take,
For to one end each laboured from his birth.

We shall not follow Dante in considering these two men equal. One is St. Dominic Gusman, born at

Calaroga, in Spain, in the year 1170, the founder of the Order of the Preaching Monks for the Conversion of Heretics.

Where Calaroga stands, the fortunate,

Beneath the shelter of the mighty shield
  Where lions subject are and subjugate,
Therein the zealous lover was revealed

Of Christ's true faith the athlete consecrate,
  Kind to her friends, to those who hate her steeled.
. . . . . .
With will and doctrine then himself he threw
  In apostolic office to proceed,
Like torrent, which its streams from high source drew;

And so upon the heretics' false breed
  He fiercely swept, most vehemently there,
Where rebel will did most his course impede.

In the chapel of the Spanish monks in Florence is a fresco by Simone Martini, representing the Church militant and triumphant; there we see at the feet of spiritual lords and saints the "dogs of the Lord"—"Domini canes"—attacking and tearing the wolves of heresy. Two great fundamental modes of regarding the world clash here: whosoever believes that all progress begins in heresy, and that almost all heresy is progress, that independence of opinion and thought is to be encouraged to the utmost, and that all orthodoxy is to be condemned as soon as it pretends to be the only right path, and condemns all others, will not join in praising the founder of the Order from which sprang the Inquisition.

Far different from him, a most lovable, humane and gracious personality, is the founder, the unwilling founder,

as one may say, of the other Order, St. Francis of Assisi.

He was born at Assisi in the year 1182, the son of Pietro Bernardone, a cloth merchant, who gave him a chivalrous education after the French fashion. He took part in several warlike expeditions, and was made prisoner in a battle against the citizens of Perugia, where he remained a full year, even in captivity proving himself the merriest of young knights. On his release, in the midst of gay festivities, he suddenly was struck by a severe illness. Then, in the face of death, certain thoughts came into his mind which never loosed their hold on it. Half cured, a convalescent, he went out into the glory of the young spring, but there again he felt only the torment of his unsatisfied soul. He resolved to take part in an expedition to Apulia, to which the city of Assisi sent a contingent; he rode out with his comrades clad in brilliant armour, but a few days later left the army and strolled pensive and restless through the mountains. For a long time he could not decide on his course, and sometimes returned to his former life. One night, at a banquet which he had given to his friends, he was elected "king of fools," and the whole party, after the banquet was over, swarmed, merrily singing and shouting, through the streets. Suddenly the others remarked that their king had remained behind. They found him, after a long search, standing lost in deep meditation. One of them said: "Don't you see that he thinks of taking a wife!" Upon that he answered as one waking up from sleep: "Yes, I think to take a wife, fairer, richer and purer than you can imagine." One day he met a leper; first he turned from him with loathing, but then, forced by an inner voice, he dismounted from his horse, gave him all



Alinari photo

the money he had with him, and humbly kissed the hand of the stricken man. Henceforth he went about begging and nursing the sick, and by doing so soon came in conflict with his father, who angrily saw the son, whom he had trained to be a knight, becoming a public fool. On the market-place of Assisi, before all the people, Francis put down money, clothes and whatever he owned of his father's goods, keeping but the shirt on his body, and, laying the bundle at his father's feet, said: "Until now I had deemed Pietro Bernardone my father; henceforth I will but say: Our Father who art in Heaven!" On that the bishop covered him with his own robe and declared him under his protection. The people, who until then had derided him, now acclaimed him. Peasants assisted him in constructing a hut; gradually a small community of brethren assembled around him, who likewise desired to live in cheerful humility. But though his renunciation was cheerful and free from gloom and terror, it was accompanied by fearful ascetic exercises: he scourged himself with chains, threw himself naked in the snow, fasts of incredible duration made him see visions, the stigmata of Christ's wounds appeared on his body. He was of a loving and ecstatic nature, and a true poet. Most remarkable and characteristic as a psychic phenomenon seems his love of St. Clara, who, inflamed by his sermons, with his aid eloped from her parent's house to become a nun—a love "unsensualised," the genuine fruit of Christianity and the spirit of the time. Infinite were his humility, his sweet temper and kindness of heart. How often did he make peace between Guelfs and Ghibellines! Love not for men only, but for all nature, was burning in his soul. He could not bear to see any creature suffering. "If I could but be presented to the

Emperor," he once said, "I should beg him that, for the love of me, he might issue a law forbidding anybody to capture or encage my sisters the larks, and which would prescribe that whosoever kept oxen or asses should be obliged to feed them particularly well at Christmas time." To swallows, disturbing his sermon by their chirp, he said: "My little sisters, you swallows, it is time for me to speak also; now listen to the word of the Lord and be quiet until I have done."

At the "Diet of Birds" at Bevagna he spoke to them: "You birds, my sisters, you must needs praise your creator and love him much, for he has given you down feathers to dress and pinions to fly with and whatever else you may have need of. He has made you noble among his creatures, and has appointed the pure air to be your dwelling-place. You need not sow, nor reap, and yet without any toil He sustains and feeds you." Of his poems only the "Hymn to the Sun" has been preserved; it is among the oldest documents of Italian poetry:

Highest, almighty, bounteous Lord,
Thine is praise and honour and glory,
And every blessing!
Thine alone are they,
And no one is worthy to speak Thy name.
Praised be Thou, O Lord, with all Thy creatures.
Especially our master, brother Sun,
Who bringeth the day and the light unto us,
And is fair and radiant with great lustre,
Of Thee, O Highest, he is the image!
Praised be Thou, O Lord, by our sister Moon and every star,
Whom Thou createst in heaven so pure and costly and fair!
Praised be Thou, O Lord, by our brother Wind,
By air and cloud and the sky and every weather,

By them Thou feedest us, every one, Thy children!
Praised be Thou, O Lord, by our sister the Water,
Which is humble and useful, and chaste and limpid.
Praised be Thou by brother Fire,
Through whom Thou dost illuminate the night,
And he is fair and joyous and of immense strength!
Praised be Thou by our sister, mother Earth,
Who sustaineth and ordereth us,
And bringeth forth fruit and many-coloured flowers and herbs!
Praised be Thou, O Lord, by those who pardon for the sake of Thy love,
Who endure infirmity and tribulation.
Blessed be those who bear it peacefully,
For by Thee, O Most High, they shall be crowned!
Praised be Thou, O Lord, by our sister, the Death of the body,
Whom no living creature may avoid.
Woe to those who in deadly sins shall die,
Blessed those who on Thy holy Will do rely!
For they will not feel the pains of the second death
O praise and bless the Lord with a grateful mind,
And with great humility serve Him.

This wonderful man, whose life Giotto has represented so simply and so appealingly in his frescoes, on whose tomb, as the legend relates, all the swallows and the doves of the neighbourhood fluttered together, never intended to found an Order, but only a community of brethren. Of course he desired to propagate his doctrine and belief. Clad in brown frocks, bound with cords, the brethren were to live in cheerful renunciation of all worldly pleasure. They occupied themselves with all kinds of work and handicrafts, swept the houses, or went around selling fresh water, assisted the peasants at the harvest; begging was allowed to them only in case of necessity, and never for money. They went about

preaching and singing; the "minstrels of the dear Lord," as Francis had called his community. He himself preached everywhere, through the whole of Europe and through the Holy Land, and his disciples did the same. The secular clergy saw the growing influence of the new sect with jealousy and found its expansion not devoid of danger. Several bishops forbade them to preach, and the brethren appealed to the Pope. The absolute prohibition of all possessions on earth seemed objectionable and dangerous to the Pope. "Regally," as Dante says, Francis, who was humility itself, answered by quoting the passage from the gospel of St. Matthew, "As ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand. Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils; freely ye have received, freely give. Provide neither gold, nor silver, nor brass in your purses, nor scrip for your journey, neither two coats, neither shoes, nor yet staves; for the workman is worthy of his meat." That is the doctrine of evangelic poverty. The question whether Christ ever had a coat of his own, and whether therefore priests were allowed to have possessions of their own, was a question which shook the foundations of the Church for centuries, and was answered in the negative as well by the Waldensians, who severed themselves from her, as by the Franciscans, who wanted to remain within her realm; but it was almost a mere chance that the latter, who were at bottom a thoroughly revolutionary sect, ever adapted themselves to the hierarchic system and remained within it. Very soon—under the reign of Boniface VIII. and still more strongly in the period of Avignon—they stood for the Emperor's side against the Pope, and a definite rupture between them and the Church was by no means improbable. But so clear-sighted a politician as was

Innocent III. soon recognised what an instrument the new community could become in the hands of the Church, and he confirmed its rule. Thus Francis met the fate which falls to the lot of all founders; his doctrine became a system. The spirit of love and poverty, which should have ruled the souls of the brethren, found outward signs, and the signs soon becoming the essential part of the institution, what had been a community by free choice was changed into one of the severest Orders. Its foundation was an historic event of immeasurable importance. It carried a democratic tendency into the Catholic religion, and to a certain extent even into the hierarchy; by the institution of the tertiaries or lay-brethren it spread a religious organisation all over the world. By this they prepared and carried on the clerical reaction which followed on the first outbreak of a free spirit in Europe and in this sense caused immense damage, for they certainly considerably retarded the development of intellectual freedom. It was this Order which, more than any other factor, discredited and destroyed the chivalrous civilisation in Germany. On the other hand, it must be conceded that they did much towards giving a deeper tone to the religious life of the period, which had become rather superficial, and indeed to all intellectual life. The influence the brethren exercised in that time is incalculable. It will be remembered that in many tales of the time, even in one or two of Shakespeare's plays, the Franciscan friar is a prominent figure.

The Order soon divided itself into "Conventuals" and into the brethren of severer observance, who were called "Spirituals." The latter held to the teaching of Abbot Joachim of Flora, whose mystic prophecies of the approaching Third Kingdom were much quoted in those troubled

times. Another was Fra Jacopone da Todi, who originally had been a lawyer, and a man of a particularly cheerful disposition, until in the year 1268 his young wife, whom he loved dearly, was killed sitting at his side at a wedding banquet by the falling-in of the ceiling. From that time he was quite changed. He went about in a hairy penance-shirt and abased himself in whatever way he could. Once he appeared at a feast naked, crawling and bridled like a horse, another time he tarred himself, then rolled in feathers, and in this state walked along the streets. Not until he had done penance for ten years did he think himself worthy to enter the Order. In the troubled reign of Pope Boniface he was one of his bitterest opponents. As his religious ecstasy in life stood on the verge of madness, so was his poetry. Among splendid and powerful passages we find verses like the following:

O Lord, O give me by Thy grace
Whatever's hurtful to man's face,
Pray Thee, send intermitting fever,
That every third day makes me shiver,
Or send it rather every day;
Whatever's healthy take away!
Let hydropsy my belly bloat
And painful soreness quell my throat.
To head and teeth send woe and pain,
Nor may the stomach less complain.

And the man who wrote such tasteless things probably was the author of the most beautiful of all Church songs, the "Stabat mater Dolorosa."

Another Franciscan, Thomas of Celano, was the poet who composed the grand hymn "Dies Iræ."

From the narrative of Brother Salimbene of Parma we may gather to what degree the institution of the Order

affected and influenced the life of men, and how it overwhelmed their hearts. He was born in the year 1221, and when seventeen years old entered the Order of St. Francis, as his brother had done before him. His father, Guido degli Adami, a Parmese knight, in despair at the loss of both his sons, indignantly recalled him. Salimbene himself says that "Brother Elias had written that, if it were my own wish, they should instantly send me back to my father. If I should not desire to go with my father, they should hold me dearer than their eyeballs. And several knights came with my father to the brethren's home in the town of Fano to see the outcome of the affair. For them I was a spectacle, for myself the source of salvation. When the spiritual and secular brethren had assembled in the chapter-hall, and many words had been spoken from both sides, my father took out the General's letter and showed it to the brethren. After it had been read, Brother Jeremiah, the guardian, answered my father, and all heard him, saying: 'My Lord Guido, we are moved by your pain and we are ready to obey the letter of our father. But here is your son. He is old enough, let him speak for himself. Ask him! If he wants to go with you, let him go in God's name, but if he does not—we cannot do him violence, to make him go with you.' Thereupon my father asked me whether I wanted to go with him or not, and I said to him: 'No, for the Lord says in the Gospel of St. Luke ix. "No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."' And my father said to me: 'Thou dost not care for thy father nor for thy mother, who is much grieved for thy sake.' And I answered to him: 'It is true, I do not care, for the Lord says in St. Matthew x. "He that loveth his father or his mother

more than me is not worthy of me"; and of thee, too, he says, "He who loveth a son or a daughter more than me is not worthy of me." Thou oughtest to care for Him, O my father, who for our sake died on the cross, that He might give life eternal unto us. For it is He who says (St. Matthew x.), "I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law, and a man's foes shall be they of his own household. And whosoever shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven, but whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven."' And the brethren were astonished and full of joy because I said such things to my father. And then my father said to the brethren: 'You have put an evil charm on my son. Let me speak to him apart from you, and you will see that he will soon follow me.' And the brethren were willing to concede it, for after my words they trusted me already a little. But behind the wall they stood listening to what we might speak, for they trembled like a rush in the water, lest my father by his loving words should unsettle my mind. And they not only feared for the salvation of my soul, but also that my turning back to the world might prevent others from entering the Order. And my father said to me: 'Beloved son, do not believe those unclean frock-bearers who fooled thee, but come with me, and I shall give thee all my estates.' And I answered my father: 'Go, go, father, for the Sage says in the Proverbs, "Do not hinder him from doing good who can do it." Therefore farewell, and do good thyself.' Then my father said with tears in his eyes: 'O my son, what am I to say to thy mother, who is unceasingly grieved

about thee?' And I answered to him: 'Thou wilt tell her from me, Thus speaketh thy son; My father and my mother have forsaken me, the Lord has taken me up.'"

In this way they went on for some time, then Salimbene relates: "On hearing that, my father despaired of my returning, and before all the lords and knights who had come with him and before the brethren he flung himself down on the floor and said: 'I recommend thee to a thousand devils, accursed son, and the brother who is with thee, and hath deceived thee. My curse be upon thee for ever, and deliver thee to the spirits of hell!' And he went away excited beyond all measure. But we remained in great comfort and thanking God, and said: 'They will curse and Thou wilt bless!' And the brethren were very joyful, because the Lord had acted so manfully in such a boy as I was.

"In that same night the Holy Virgin rewarded me, for it seemed to me that I lay prostrate before the altar, as the brethren are wont to do at morning service. And I heard the voice of the Holy Virgin, who sat upon the altar on that place, where the host and the chalice are kept, and she had her little Boy in her lap and held him out to me and said: 'Come nearer and be comforted and kiss my Son, whom thou didst confess yesterday before men!' And still standing fearfully I saw the Child open its arms, in joyful expectation of me. And encouraged by the Boy's innocence and the playfulness, and verily by the rich grace of the Mother herself, too, I stepped nearer and embraced and kissed Him, and the Mother bounteously left Him in my arms for a long while. And as I could not satiate myself in kissing Him, the most blessed Virgin blessed me and said: 'Go, beloved son, and lay thee down to rest, that the brethren, who rise for the

morning service, may not find thee here with us.' And I went to rest and the vision vanished. But in my heart there remained such sweetness that I cannot express it in words. And I confess the truth, that never in the world did I feel such sweetness, and that time I understood that Holy Writ speaks truth where it says, 'That if a man has tasted of the Spirit, all flesh will no longer please him.'"

Thus the same ecstasy had pervaded the religious life of the people which appeared in the feelings and expressions of love of the refined. The time had come for the most ecstatic, the most visionary of poets, who united both the ecstasy of love and of religious belief, and who for a time had been himself either a Franciscan novice or a tertiary.

CHAPTER XIII

FLORENCE

There are towns on which is shed a certain halo of glory, of beauty and greatness, so that they seem endowed with a more intense and individual life than others: Athens, Rome, Florence, and Venice, London and Paris are such, and many a modern city will increase this number in the course of time. The number of great men and works that Florence has produced is legion; the historical events of the town are a miniature history of the world. The character of her people has been so peculiar, so sharply defined, so different from all others, that the town seems to have harboured a race peculiarly her own. Much has been written on Florence, and yet until lately we knew almost nothing about her first centuries. The chroniclers related the old traditionary fables, and historians more or less merely copied the chroniclers.

It has been reserved for a German historian, Dr. Robert Davidsohn, whose work appeared five years ago, to throw light on the darkness of so many centuries; and, as it were, by a lucky excavation he has put us into a position to see little old Florence arise and gradually extend and grow before our eyes. That its mother-town was Fiesole was long known. Atalantus, a nephew of Jupiter and

grandson to Nimrod, so Villani tells, is said to have founded it as the first town after the Deluge. He spoke the words, "Fia sola!" ("Let her be alone") and from that the town's name was derived. History, however, apprises us that from immemorial times a Tuscan town, called Fæsulæ, was seated on the hill, and that by its citizens a colony was founded on the plain called Florentia, and destroyed by Sulla in the year 82 B.C. The new Roman Florence was founded about the year 49 B.C. by Cæsar, or at least in following out his agrarian laws. The town soon became richly adorned, and in later years shared the fate of the Roman towns in the declining and falling empire. After having been several times captured and plundered in the many wars of those terrible centuries, it was repeatedly occupied and besieged in the Gothic wars by both sides; the city legend of later centuries, confounding the Gothic king Totila with Attila, related that Totila and the Huns destroyed it, whereupon it lay in ruins for more than two hundred years, until Charlemagne restored it. History knows nothing of all this; it records but the fact that Charlemagne repeatedly sojourned in Florence, and that he deposed the Longobard Duke Gudibrand from his office, and in his place appointed Count Scrot, from the Lake of Constance, to be Count of Florence-Fiesole. From that time German margraves governed in Tuscany, most of them of Frankish origin, until they were supplanted later by Vicars of the Empire. The names of the noble families, the Counts Alberti, Aldobrandeschi, Guidi, likewise betray their German origin. They for the time were the real masters of the land, ruling it from their castles. The inhabitants of the town were mostly tenants and serfs. Yet, being the dwelling-place of the bishop and his chapter, it was not

without a certain importance. A viscount dealt justice in it in the place of the marquis.

How much or how little time the new municipality took to develop, the exact date when it began to play a part and to become a social power, is not quite known. Yet we find that certain lordly privileges, which formerly had been reserved to the high-born few, soon were granted to the new communities of the lower class. Florence levied an urban tax as early as the eleventh century, and the first municipal offices are to be found about the same time. Noble families, like those of the Suavizi, the Gotizi, the Figuinildi (all names of German origin), began to pass several months of the year in the town. Already the city seems to have enjoyed a certain degree of independence. The Pisans could say to the Pope, "We are neither lords nor serfs," and combats were fought for these privileges even against the duke-marquis.

In the beginning this development was unconscious, being simply a consequence of the concentration of forces in one place. But from the twelfth century the citizens became conscious of their power and of the ways to increase it, and they began a slow and well-meditated warfare against the noble families, who were rulers of the land. The names of 205 castles which existed in the county about the year 1200 have been preserved, but there undoubtedly were many more of them. One after the other fell in those endless little wars, being either razed, occupied or subjected, and whosoever to-day travelling through Tuscany sees the fortresses of Montelupo, Capraja, Certaldo, Colle di Val d' Elsa, and all the numerous little towns and ruined castles, with their high walls built in the rocks, may think how often the scaling-ladders were placed against them, and how often armed

men rolled down from them into the ditch below. One lordly race after the other — the Aldobrandeschi, the Buondelmonti—were constrained to pass a part of the year in the town, and so become members of the commune. In the year 1108 the Alberti, descended from the blood of Frankish dukes, were made to swear "in a doleful voice" to renounce all taxes which until now they had levied from the citizens passing through their territory. Such was also the fate of the Adimari. The wars against the Guidi never ended.

The city often made a pretext of fighting for the rights of their bishop, and a candle of wax, which the foe was bound to furnish at the Feast of St. John the Baptist in Florence, was usually the sign of his subjection. Of course, wars against the neighbouring towns were not wanting. In such case the Martinella, the war-bell, rang for a whole month, and the Carroccio, the car of the banner, drawn by oxen, went out with the army. The city did not shrink from opposing the emperor himself: Henry IV. was the first who had to besiege it. That time it had but been the Marchioness Matilda who defended her capital against the enemy of her papal friend; but in the year 1155 Florence herself shut her gates on Barbarossa. In vain the Emperor raised the Guidi, the Alberti and Aldobrandeschi to the rank of Princes of the Empire, in vain did he confiscate all the town's rights beyond her walls—the invincible progress, which implied a shifting of all powers, was not to be impeded. The town knew how to recover the lost rights, and not the new Princes of the Empire, but the towns, united in the Guelf Tuscan League, became the ruling power in Tuscany.

About the year 1200 the town was governed by consuls

and their councils. The people assembled in the church of St. Reparata, organised in guilds or according to the town quarters. Industry began to develop, the manufacture of silk, paper, furs, carved ivory and the goldsmiths art soon attained a high degree of perfection in Florence. With Pisa and Bologna the town stood in constant commercial relations. Her factories were to be found in Messina; banking-houses arose and acquired great wealth. How important the coinage of the town was and how widely spread her commerce is proved by the town's name being commemorated to this day in the "florin." Around the town lay a fruitful and well-cultivated land, rich in wine, corn, oil, fruits and herbs. On market-days once a week the roads were crowded with ox-carts bringing the corn into town and mules carrying oil and wine. The smaller commerce was carried on by pedlars. In every village physicians and apothecaries were to be found. Schools began to be established, and before long a law-school was founded in Florence. The town itself was a gloomy grey little place, surrounded by its second wall, the first having proved too limited, with narrow streets, houses with jutting upper storeys built in the style which is called Italian-Gothic, small squares and countless towers, for the various quarters were all organised in small corporations, each of which kept a common tower for the sake of quick defence in case of riot. In it dwelled a warlike and money-loving people, gifted and humorous, whose life passed in petty business and little wars. The year was interrupted by fifty-two Sundays and fifty-six holidays. At the great Church festivals processions with flaming candles marched through the town, on the day of St. Agatha all the church bells were rung, and on one and the same day at Easter-

time all the children born in the year were baptized in that old baptistery of San Giovanni, who was the town's patron. Of art and culture there are but few traces to be found from those times, but all people were devoted to chivalrous exercise, and a great number of clubs served to promote sociability and perfection in arms.

This small grey town was the bud from which in the thirteenth century, the century of revolution, the Florence of the Renaissance began its glorious unfolding. The Florentines afterwards praised this time as the golden era. Dante sang of it:

Florence, whose ancient walls around her soil
  Still hear the tierce and nones of neighbouring shrine,
Was chaste and sober and without turmoil.

No golden chains, no crosses, that glittering shine,
  Nor sandalled dames had she, nor bordered zone
That from the wearer drew the gazer's eyne;

She made not then the father's heart to groan
  O'er daughters' births, for then the year and dower
Had not, this side or that, due bounds outgrown,

No homes undwelt in had she in that hour,
  Not then had come a new Sardanapal
To show a wanton chambering's evil power.

. . . . . .

Bellincion Berti saw I girdled go
  With bone and leather, and I saw his bride
Turn from her mirror with no painted show.

A Nerli and a Vecchio, too, I spied,
  Content with dress, where plain buff met the eye,
Their wives with flax and spindle occupied.

O happy they!—and each might certain die
  Of her own burial-place, and none was yet
For France left lonely in her bed to lie.

This o'er the cradle watchful care did set,
And hushed her infant with the babbling speech,
Which doeth in parents' hearts delight beget;

That from her distaff would the long thread reach,
And as she conversed with her family,
Of Trojans, Fiesole and Rome, would teach,

Men then had seen with full as wondering eye
A Cianghella or a Saltorell
As now a Cincinnate or Cornelie.

To such fair life, where all sped calm and well
True life of citizens, to such a share
In citizenship true, to such hostel,

Did Mary give me, called by many a prayer
To that your old baptistery, wherein
Christian's and Cacciaguida's name I bare.

(PLUMPTRE.)

These are the words uttered in Paradise by Dante's ancestor Cacciaguida to his grandson, but, to tell the truth, the customs of the good old time were, as ever, only ruder, not better.

Until then Florence, despite all her achievements, had been a relatively insignificant town. Rome was the imperial city, the place of coronation. Venice was one of the first powers in Europe, the Lombards were the redoubted foes of the Emperor, Pisa ruled Corsica and Sardinia, Genoa rivalled her and Venice, Bologna shone by the glory of her schools. Florence was the last in the line, but now her time had come. For the second time she broke her walls and surrounded herself with the third and last. The great and celebrated buildings were begun and the first great names meet our eyes. Until then the town had been a dull mass; now individualities began to

detach themselves from the crowd, a sure sign that the dark age was over.

In politics the town generally had stood on the Church's side, in the War of Investiture as well as against the Hohenstaufens; but now the struggle between Guelfs and Ghibellines first began to stir and to shake the inmost life of the city. Parallel with it went on the discord between the nobility and the common people, by which, as in ancient Rome the complicated Florentine constitution was formed. The interior history of the city became full of dramatic interest with constant revolutions, turbulent street riots and wild rebellious uprisings of the people. A few brilliant or sturdy figures detached themselves from the angry crowd; they do but pass the scene to perish, the catastrophe of their tragedies being either the scaffold or exile. Beautiful episodes in the drama are the flowery feasts and the love-affairs, graceful or bloody, which were glorified by the great poets of later years. The scene is the ever more glorious city, art and artists play their parts, the drama becomes ever more varied and broader, Rome and the emperors take part in it—Charles V. besieges the town for a Medicean pope's sake, and Michael Angelo directs the construction of fortifications against him—until it gradually runs out like so many dramas of history and ends in despotic rigidity.

The time of Dante's life marks but its beginning. The citizens were divided into the "Grandi," that is, the members of the old nobility, and the people. The rich merchants, who were called the "popolo grasso," soon were separated from the rest of the people, who in their turn became divided into the lesser guilds and into the "plebe minuta," the working class. The incessant conflicts, against which the judicial officers proved of no avail, led

in Florence, as in many other towns, to the institution of the "podestà," that is, a foreign nobleman being intrusted with its government, or rather with the highest judicial power.

Only an honest and powerful man of noble and, of course, foreign birth could be elected to that office. His salary varied according to the importance and opulence of the town he was called to govern. We know of "podestàs" who received 1500 gold florins. On his arrival in the town, the knights and the common people, the bishop and the ex-podestà at their head, went out to meet him. Sometimes he was greeted by maidens bearing green branches. On entering the city he went to a church to pray, after which he swore to observe the statutes, and summoned a general assembly for the next Sunday. His court and his chancery, his notaries, judges, armed men afoot and on horseback, his marshals and knights, were all foreigners, whom he brought with him. He was clad in a scarlet robe, but during his term of office he was neither allowed to leave the town, nor to dine out with any of the citizens, nor even to have social intercourse with them, so deep was the mistrust of the parties. Another condition generally imposed on the podestà was his being forbidden to bring a wife with him. The first podestà was called to Florence in the year 1207.

The Florentine chroniclers and historians record that the great party-dissensions first broke out in the year 1215. But we know, as Dr. Davidsohn has pointed out, that long before that time, and particularly about the year 1170 wild turmoils and party-struggles raged in the streets of Florence, in which barricades were thrown up, from all towers projectiles were shot, houses were burnt and torn down. But, strange to say, all this entirely fell into oblivion, and

the origin of the great wars of the parties was traced back to a love-affair of a Buondelmonte, who had been engaged to a lady of the Amidei, but, a few days before that fixed for the wedding, clandestinely married the beautiful Aldruda, the daughter of Messer Fortiguerra Donati. The offended family took council with their friends, and the debate running on to some length, Mosca de' Lamberti, whose punishment Dante witnessed in hell, ended it with the famous words, "Cosa fatta capo ha."* On the next day Buondelmonte was slain on the old bridge at the foot of the ancient statue of Mars.

From that time the nobility and the people also were divided into the two historical parties; but one must be careful not to overvalue their names. Not Church and Emperor were the essential causes of discord for the Italian Guelfs and Ghibellines. They only inclined to one of these two powers to back their proper aims and interests. Neither was it, as sometimes has been said, an uprising of Guelf patriots against the foreign yoke; in Florence, for instance, the Guelfs favoured the French policy to such a degree that it became the universal belief that the lily in their coat of arms was derived from the French lily, and had been transferred to the Florentine shield on their own demand and by special permission of the French king.† No, all the countless causes of dissension which can and will arise in so troubled a time and in a country so torn in itself, all the many conflicting interests, the differences of races, classes, and rival cities, the combat of great ideas as well as the smallest local enmities and family feuds, were all covered,

* "A thing done is over."

† The Guelfs in the year 1215 had chosen the red lily in a white field, while the Ghibellines kept to the old shield with the white lily in red.

and in each town differently, by the names of the two great parties. The only thing common to all was strife.

In Florence the chiefs of the Ghibellines were the family of the Uberti, and, assisted by the Hohenstaufens, they were victorious for a while. Frederic sent his natural son Frederic of Antioch to Florence as podestà.

The Guelfs left the city and their towers were demolished. This happened in the year 1249. Two years afterwards Frederick II. was dead, and the people immediately called back the Guelfs. The Florentine people assembled in the Church of San-Lorenzo, where the first democratic constitution was decreed. It organised itself under 110 banners, twenty-four for the town and eighty-six for the open country. At their heads stood the "Capitano del popolo," who, like the podestà, had to be a foreigner. Both held the offices of chief-justices of the town. The highest legislative power was conferred on the twelve "Anziani," two for each of the six town-quarters. The popular origin of this revolution, which was called the "Popolo vecchio" (something like "old popular constitution"), is made manifest by a law which fixed the permitted height of the towers on the noblemen's palaces to 180 feet instead of 320, as it had been before. The Ghibelline nobility refusing to submit, and conspiring against the constitution, first its leaders, and then, in the year 1258, the whole party was banished from the town. They assembled at Siena, always hostile to Florence, and prepared for armed resistance. "Better die on the spot than miserably wander through the wide world," said their chief, Farinata degli Uberti. King Manfred sent Count Giordano Lancia with 800 knights to their reinforcement. The city of Florence equipped an army of 30,000 men on foot and 3000 horse, nevertheless at Montaperti they were

totally defeated. That was the battle "which made the Arbia flow in colour red," and of which one may hear the Sienese proudly boast to this day. The Guelfs retired to Lucca, and—a fact highly characteristic for the Italian parties—applied for help to Conradin of Hohenstaufen, who then was a boy of twelve years. The embittered victors wanted to destroy Florence, and it was saved only by the very decided resistance of Farinata the "High-minded," as Dante calls him, who finds him in hell lying among the heretics in their fiery coffins. He declared that he would rather turn his sword against his allies than suffer Florence to be destroyed. The constitution was abolished, Count Guido Novello was elected podestà, and during five years the Ghibelline nobility ruled Florence with a high hand. After this term Manfred was forced by his own precarious situation to call back Giordano with his auxiliaries, and soon after fell himself, on February 26, 1266, in the battle of Benevento against Charles of Anjou. This was the end of the handsome fair-haired King Manfred, whose name was glorified by so many bards, and of whom a French *trouvère* sang the following verses:

Biaus chevalier et preus
Et sage fu Mainfrois,
De toutes bonnes tèches
Entèchies et courtois,
En lui ne falloit riens,
Forsque seulement fois;
Mais cette faute est laide
En contes et en Rois.

In vain had he asked the Pope for peace. Clement answered: "Let King Manfred know that the time of grace is over. There is time for all, but all is not in time. The hero already steps forth in arms, the axe is laid to

the root." Charles refused burial to his corpse. The French soldiers, however, full of admiration for the gallant prince, buried him against their king's will. But the papal legate, the Archbishop of Cosenza, of the house of Pignatelli, ordered the corpse to be dug out again and to be thrown away, because of his having died excommunicated by the Church. Nevertheless Dante, in the seventh canto of Purgatory, meets one "who was fair-haired, handsome, and of graceful looks, but his brow was split by a sword-cut," and who on his astonished question gives answer:

Salvation is not lost by a priest's curse,
And ever may eternal love give grace.

The Guelfs in Tuscany immediately began to stir; an attempt of the Ghibellines to reconcile them being foiled, Guido Novello left Florence accompanied by 1500 knights. In the meantime Conradin had passed the Alps. The Guelfs, who seven years before had called on him to assist them, now applied to Charles, who sent the Count of Montfort with 800 French knights to them. Without waiting for his arrival, the Ghibellines left the city for ever, on the Saturday of Easter 1267. Two years before that event Dante was born. Henceforth the town was Guelf. The Ghibellines' estates were confiscated and divided, and the "Capitani di Parte Guelfa," that is, the heads of the Guelf party, henceforth were the chiefs of the town.

This result by no means implies that the town was the Church's. Besides, the great combat had, as almost all protracted historical struggles do, led to quite different results than those which the conflicting parties had fought for. The Empire and the Papacy had killed each other.

In the great theocratic sense of the mediæval ideal they had ceased to exist. The Empire had died with Frederick II. The Papacy fell fifty years later with Boniface VIII. Henceforth their world-dominating power not only had to abandon all hope of ever becoming established in fact, but was not even acknowledged as a right. Henceforth there was no longer one comprehensive empire in Europe, but national states, or groups of such. The old imperial and theocratic ideas still lived on in the minds of the people, but only to prove their practical impotence. France henceforth was France, Germany was essentially Germany, and Florence was the republic of Florence, no inconsiderable power among the others.

The city, though it had become Guelf throughout, was not on this account more settled or peaceful. The social preponderance of the nobility, and the consequent discontent of the people, caused constant dissension and troubles, until they led to the famous second democratic revolution of 1282, which was a bloodless one, and was called the "secondo popolo." By the new constitution the guilds were made the basis of the town's government; there were seven higher guilds: 1, the lawyers; 2, the clothiers; 3, the money-changers; 4, the wool manufacturers; 5, physicians and pharmacists; 6, silk-merchants; 7, the furriers. The five lesser guilds were: 1, the small merchants of cloth; 2, the butchers; 3, the shoemakers and stocking-weavers; 4, the carpenters and masons; 5, the smiths and ironworkers. Later on were added nine "small guilds" of the smaller mechanics. At the head of the administration were placed six Priors, "to superintend the treasury, to deal justice to all, and to protect the weak and the powerless against the great and strong." An electoral committee, consisting of the

retiring Priors, the councillors, the heads of the guilds, and assessors appointed by the committee itself, elected in secret and complicated ballot 126 Priors for forty-two months, six of whom were drawn by lot to govern the town in turns of two months. While their term lasted they dwelt in the Palazzo del Popolo. The highest judicial power remained in the hands of the podestâ, the military command in those of the Capitano del Popolo.

A whole system of councils participated in the government, and thus limited the power of the "Signori," as the Priors were also called. Only the drafting of the laws and the introduction of them in the Council fell to their office. But even that they were bound to do in common with the "Savi," the "wise men," and with the heads of the guilds who had the right of sitting and voting in all assemblies. The "Savi," or "Buoni Uomini" (good men), were twelve or fourteen in number, and deliberated either alone or with other "Savi" selected from the different quarters, or with the heads of the guilds. Then there was the "Consiglio speciale" or "di Credenza," and the "Consiglio generale" of the "Capitano del Popolo," which assembled in the episcopal palace, and later on in San Piero Scheraggio. Further councils were the "Consiglio generale" of the Three Hundred, and the "Consiglio speciale" of the Ninety "Del Comune." Both were presided over by the podestà. From the year 1289 there existed a sixth council, that of the Hundred, which was composed of "popolani" alone, for preliminary deliberation on the public expenses and other difficult matters.

This constitution was far from being stable, and its changes were manifold. But its state at the time when Dante took an active part in the politics of his native city

was much as described. Whatever the Priori had discussed and settled either for themselves with the capitano or the podestà or with their different assistant councillors had to pass through all the councils one after the other. This, of course, caused much talking and debating and referring, and the whole proceeding was rather long-winded. Sometimes the debate seems to have been lengthened, as it were, with conscious mockery. An ambassador from Lucca asking when the Florentine army would set out against the Pisans, seven different sessions of councils were summoned from May 7 to 25 to answer his question; at the end he was baffled by the reply that the army would move on a certain day unless there should occur anything new, or any cause should arise which would make it advisable to postpone the march. All the councils invariably had to be consulted on anything that was against the constitution, as well as on all important proposals, expenses and similar questions. Other matters belonged to the competence of only one council. Within the first fortnight of their office the Priors were bound to summon a general assembly of the people, in which every citizen had the right of motion. In case of need, extraordinary assemblies of the people were summoned; it was in such a meeting that Dante, the motion being to grant the Pope's request of assistance in his war against the Colonna, gave his voice: *quod nihil fiat.* The Savi and the Capitudini were summoned by special messengers, all the other councillors by heralds, trumpets, and bells. The right of first speech in the assembly belonged to the podestà, but if he was represented by one of his judges, or whenever the capitano was alone, the first word was the latter's. Then followed the different orators; the voting was performed by rising from the chairs, in impor-

tant cases by little balls of lead, which were thrown either into a white urn, on which was written the Latin word "sic" (yes), or into a red one, on which was written "non." In common cases the absolute majority decided, sometimes two-thirds were required. The "consigliere" had to be twenty-five years old, and was elected for six months by the Priors, and different "Savi" for each quarter. When this term had elapsed, he could not be re-elected before another six months had past. The elected councillor was bound to swear that he would attend the sittings and stay until the close, unless the mover of the bill gave him permission to go. For absence without leave he was fined from two to twenty *solidi*. In the protocols kept by the notaries we find many absences notwithstanding, and all kinds of excuses. One councillor declared that he had been still in bed, another that he had not heard the bell. Whosoever could swear to this, and could prove that he had been outside the town, was excused; therefore many councillors sojourned in the country as much as possible.

This constitution was complicated, ponderous, and yet most unsteady, but it allowed freest range to all tendencies, all powers in the state partaking on an almost equal footing in the government. The town was like a strong electric friction machine, with the electric force streaming from countless points and buttons. And always the atmosphere around it was heavily charged. But no one-sidedness was possible, every citizen being business man, politician and warrior at the same time.

Ten years later the constitution was again revised amid great turmoil, and developed in a democratic sense. The leader of the popular party was a nobleman, Giano della Bella. By his efforts the small corporations were allowed

to share in the government.* At the same time, thirty-three noble families were for ever excluded from all public offices, a number of "privilegia invidiosa" were created for the nobility. Whenever a common citizen was killed by a nobleman's fault, the palace of the nobleman was destroyed and all members of his family held responsible. Two witnesses or public report were sufficient to convict a nobleman. To sustain the people's authority a new military organisation was established, at the head of which was placed the "Gonfaloniere della Giustizia" (Standard-bearer of Justice). Under the command of this officer stood eighty companies, each of fifty men, whose service was limited to the town itself, and who in their banner bore the 'scutcheon of the Florentine people, which was a red cross in a white shield. These laws were executed as parties will execute laws; not a year had passed before the houses of the Galigai † were demolished because one of the family had murdered a Florentine citizen in France. "The Grandees," Dino says, "vehemently complained of these laws, and to those who executed them they said: 'A horse in running touches a citizen's face with its tail, a nobleman in a throng unintentionally kicks a citizen, he complains, and because of such trifles a man is ruined.'" They found ways to render Giano della Bella suspect to the people, and he met a similar fate with the Gracchi and so many other leaders of the ungrateful crowd—death in exile. Villani, who belonged to the opposite party, bears witness that he

* Later, in the year 1342, they received equal rights with the greater guilds; in the year 1378 the same rights were extended to the working people.

† That is the name given by Dino Compagni, who was in that year Gonfaloniere, and himself records the fact. Villani and Machiavelli give another name and also another Gonfaloniere, Rubaldo Ruffoli.

was "the most loyal and honest Popolano of Florence, whose every endeavour was for the common best; a man who sacrificed his possessions to the commonwealth and never enriched himself." Dino Compagni likewise says: "He was a high-minded man, and so bold, that he took upon himself what others abandoned, and spoke what others never dared to utter." Dante was seventeen years old when this democratic revolution took place.

Again the people were divided into two parties. The nobility strove to recover their lost rights, and the power which they still possessed, in fact, almost amounted to more than these rights themselves. The Ghibellines, avowed or clandestine, now took the side of the popular party, because it stood against the Guelf aristocracy. The popular party, however, seems to have behaved rather haughtily towards the still lower classes, and to have excluded what they called the "mob," for we soon shall find the latter on the side of the Donati.

The new parties called themselves "Black" and "White." The names were derived from a bloody family feud which had broken out in Pistoia in consequence of a cruel vengeance between the "black" and the "white" Cancellieri, and which by the Florentines declaring for one or the other party in the subject town had been carried to Florence. Messer Corso Donati was the leader of the Blacks—"a knight after the fashion of the Roman Catiline, but more cruel than he, of noble blood and handsome appearance, a perfect orator with the finest manners, acute mind and the very worst disposition," that is Dino Compagni's description of him. The very beginning of his career was a violence done to the law, for he liberated a criminal of noble birth with armed force. In the battle of Campaldino it was he who decided the victory

by a cavalry attack, which he had been forbidden under penalty of death to make. His sister Piccarda, who was a nun, he carried off from her convent by force and married her to one of his friends. He was said to have poisoned his wife. For the law and the citizens he always and openly showed the utmost contempt. Yet the people admired him in spite of their fear. "Evviva il Barone!" was the cry heard when on his black horse he rode through the streets of Florence. "This Messer Corso," Villani says, "was the most intelligent knight, the most courageous and best orator, the most able and famous politician of his time in Italy, a man of strong passions and great enterprise." He was Dante's kinsman by marriage and his bitterest enemy—"The founder of all evil," Dante calls him, and in "Purgatory" Buonagiunta predicts his fearful end.

Against him stood the leader of the "Bourgeoisie," Vieri de' Cerchi, as proud and brave as the other, but irresolute and incapable. The Cerchi were the first merchant house in Europe. They had bought the palace of the banished Count Guidi, and "imitated the behaviour of the nobility," as the chronicler tells, "nouveaux-riches" of the thirteenth century. The "Intellectuels" of the city were all on their side. It is interesting to read in Dino's book, who equally belonged to the White party, by what reasons, according to his opinion, influential Florentines had been decided to follow either party. Guido Cavalcanti had done so "because he was a personal enemy of Corso Donati," Naldo Gherardini "out of hatred against the Manieri," Manetto Scali "because he was kinsman to the Cerchi," Berto Frescobaldi "because they had lent him a good deal of money," Goccia Adimari "because he had fallen out with his family," the young Bernardo Adimari

"out of good fellowship," those of the house of Tosa "to defy Messer Rosso, their kinsman."

Both parties sought allies outside. Donati courted the favour of the Pope, the others inclined to the Ghibellines. Civil war had become inevitable, and it broke out with wild bloodshed in the year after the Jubilee, 1301; but this event being also the catastrophe of Dante's life, who, energetic and impulsive as he was, had become deeply engaged in the politics of his town, must be reserved to a later chapter.

Loud are the laments of Dante, of Dino Compagni on this time "of wrong, of scandal, of fury and of fratricide." To us it appears like a dramatic piece, in whose conflicts the powerful and interesting characters of the time were formed and sharpened. The great man who was entangled in it and became its victim has shed a personal tragic splendour on this strife, which makes it more attractive than those of other cities. And amidst all this trouble the city rose to ever greater power and beauty. At the same time, with these internal dissensions and these strivings for the constitution, wars were fought and victories gained against Arezzo, Pisa and other neighbouring towns. In the short intervals between the eruptions of public wrath the fervid spirit of useful life and the exuberant joy of this healthy generation continued to celebrate its gladsome feasts. In every town of Tuscany there were social clubs, whose members enjoyed and spent their life carousing in merry wastefulness. The city became ever more beautiful. Dante's friend, Giotto, delivered art from the rigid forms of the earlier times, and painted his frescoes in Florence, as in Padua and Assisi, with all his severe simplicity, which seems so characteristic of his time, and which reappears in the beautiful

lines and cheerful colours of the tower he built in Florence, which seems to rise into the air, as it were, on wings. In the year 1298 Arnolfo di Cambio began the construction of the "Palazzo del Popolo," which, with its strong and powerful forms, its sturdy battlements, and its slender and daring tower, more, perhaps, than any other town hall to this day reflects the spirit of its time, a true sign of old popular sovereignty. In its neighbourhood stands the Palazzo del Podestâ, with its wonderful courtyard, where the stone coats of arms on the walls tell of the old podestàs of Florence, and on the corridor of the first floor the bells are ranged which rang to the uproar of those far-gone days; then the light Church of the Franciscans of Santa Croce, Santa Maria Novella, where the frescoes of Martini and Taddeo Gaddi, though belonging to a later period, more than others seem to be imbued with the spirit of Dante. It was a city, with a small kingdom's power, in exuberant growth. And then, in the year of the Jubilee, Giovanni Villani saw Rome decayed and fallen, and thinking of his native town arising in such splendour, resolved to write his chronicle, which is among the best historical works of the Middle Ages, and in which a very important chapter is devoted to Dante himself.

Villani, of course, simply told what he had seen and heard. Every human brain is a camera obscura, but the lens through which the rays enter will refract them at very different angles. We shall find the same world through which until now we have walked in ever narrower circles, totally changed and altered in Dante's head. We shall find it arranged as a wonderful, immense building; we shall enter a cathedral, the foundations of which are laid in the depths of hell, and reflect all the horrors and crimes of those wild and cruel times in the terrible judg-

ment which the wrathful Deity of mediæval Christendom deals. Then we shall mount on serene and lucid stairs, leading on, through penitence to purification, to a splendour of dazzling light, such as never poet before or after him knew how to evoke in men's fancies, as painters may perhaps have dreamt but never known to paint. And in every part of this cathedral we shall encounter the men who lived in the world we have tried to describe, and from the howling yells deep below, through the slow, penitential chants of the stairs, up to the blessed choirs in the celestial space, there sounds one music of many-sounding harmonies, in which the voices of all speakers join—the *terze rime* of Dante.

But the "Divine Comedy" is not only an image of the time, it does not only assemble the souls of men in its three realms, it is at the same time the secret interior path of Dante through his life. And thus through his life we shall follow him.

PART II

DANTE

CHAPTER I

THE WORK OF DANTE

DANTE'S life lies in his work. It is a microcosm, a minute universe; clear and brilliant with colours like a crystal ball it lies before us, in the firm structure of the *terza rima*, so indissoluble that not one single verse could be taken out without destroying the whole; incredibly small if compared to the life-work of Shakespeare or Goethe, and yet the ideal of all poetry is fulfilled in it. The Self and the World, which are inseparably mixed in every human soul, are, as it were, caught and reproduced in verse, as mystically and incomprehensibly reflected in each other as they are in reality; an eternal image of both the human soul and the world as they were in those days.

But of the story of this man who bequeathed us the key to his time, to whom his beautiful town owes its highest and most attractive charm, we know but little. The few facts of Dante's life which are indubitable are soon told.*

* Most of the so-called biographies of Dante are "romances founded on improbable traditions and arbitrary suppositions" (Scartazzini). It was necessary to put to a severe test the often contradictory notices which his contemporaries left us, and to make cautious use of the important allusions in his writings. Not before our own century, or rather not until the last decades of it, did critical historians contrive to lay bare a meagre thread which may serve us to follow the development of his work.

It were a just cause of wonder that contemporaries have so little to tell of a man like Dante, and certainly some notices were lost in the course of so many ages.

But, in general, Dante's contemporaries had other cares than to tell of Dante. For the men of the thirteenth century Dante was not at all the Dante whom we know, as little as for those of the sixteenth century Shakespeare was our "Shakespeare." He was simply Dante Alighieri of St. Peter's Gate in Florence, a scholar, of whom it was known that he had written some fine poems, just as Shakespeare was to his countrymen a glove-maker's son from Stratford, a player, who used to compose plays for the stage.

When he came to old age he had acquired some fame, though in his latest years he still could write:

> It would be vain to tell you who I am,
> Because my name does not yet sound afar;

but perhaps none of his countrymen had a perfect notion of his overpowering greatness, of the breadth and depth of his genius, of the gigantic edifice of his fancy, for which he laid the foundation slowly year after year by his studies, by his writings, by the events of his life—foundations which were so far stretched that nobody's eye was sharp enough to encompass their circumference.

To explain this phenomenon, which repeats itself throughout all history, Brandes has used the following simile:

"When a man is twenty steps in advance of his own time, everybody will follow him and praise him as the guide; but when he is more than a thousand steps ahead of his generation he becomes invisible, and long after the world walks in his footsteps." But that is only a simile,

No one has an idea of the world existing in another's soul, be it great or small; and just in those men who dig the deepest shafts and inclose the broadest fields work and utterance are slow and incomprehensible.

A hut may be built in a few days, but it takes a long time before a layman will understand what the foundations of a large building are made for, and whether they have any architectural meaning at all. It would seem that genius works in the same way that the spirits in the "Arabian Nights" built Aladdin's palace—one day it stands there, but nobody saw how it was constructed; one day the book is published, the picture is shown, and nobody knows that a life was consumed in making it.

We have a German proverb: "Don't show a half-finished house to a fool," because he never will understand what it is to be. When it comes to judging the half-finished works of genius, almost all men are fools. That was the reason why Dante was not recognised.

With Shakespeare the cause may have been different; his works were in such a degree the expression of his time that they seemed quite natural to his contemporaries, as natural as the sea, as the rising of the sun, or the new vegetation of spring seems to be.

Be this as it may, Dante passed during the first half of his life for a young man of good family, who occasionally wrote fine poems; even during the latter half he was a rather unimportant, poor, woe-stricken, joyless, wandering man, who often did not know how to live, better known as a politician than as a poet, but even as a politician the follower of a vanquished and hated party, a reactionary whose ideals and wishes were never fulfilled and never could be.

All this and much more gives a tragic feature to his whole

life. He is, indeed, one of the most tragic men known to history. A man from whose very temperament necessarily resulted the most painful conflicts, such as inevitably separate a strongly developed, towering personality from his time and his world. No element of tragedy is wanting, not even the "Katharsis," the melodious strain with which the pilgrimage of his life closed. So Carlyle describes his face on that portrait which, "looking at it, you cannot help inclining to think genuine."

"A most touching face, perhaps of all faces that I know the most so. Lonely there, painted as on vacancy, with the simple laurel wound round it; the deathless sorrow and pain, the known victory which is also deathless;—significant of the whole history of Dante! I think it is the mournfulest face that ever was painted from reality; an altogether tragic, heart-affecting face. There is in it, as foundation of it, the softness, tenderness, gentle affection as of a child; but all this as if congealed into sharp contradiction, into abnegation, isolation, proud hopeless pain. A soft ethereal soul looking out so stern, implacable, grim-trenchant, as from imprisonment of thick-ribbed ice! Withal it is a silent pain too, a silent scornful one: the lip is curled in a kind of god-like disdain, of the thing that is eating out his heart—as if it were withal a mean insignificant thing, as if he whom it had power to torture and strangle were greater than it. The face of one wholly in protest, and lifelong unsurrendering battle against the world. Affection all converted into indignation; slow, equable, silent, like that of a god!"

I said above that we know almost nothing of Dante, and yet we all have so much to tell of him personally. We may even say: "There is perhaps no great poet of whom we know less and perhaps none whom we know

better. . . ." Emerson said so of Shakespeare, but how much truer is it of Dante!

For what is it that we seek to know when we study the history of a man's life, or inquire in what town he lived, where he got his learning, what society he kept, whether he was loved by women and by what women, and whom he married, and how he acted in the different situations of his life, how it came to pass that he wrote such works? Why do we hunt for his letters; why compare his portraits and books? Can these poor facts really be so interesting to us? Is it only a pedant schoolmaster's love for dates and names?

Or is it the real man whom we seek? I believe we want to know what kind of man was he who stood behind all this, and whom we want to know as well in his deeds as in his writings. This man has moved us by his book. Who was he that wrote such a book, and what kind of man was he? What was his life? What provoked him to such utterance? That is the source of all biography.

But the most vehement emotions a man can feel, that which stirs him deepest, the true poet will utter in his works. No writer may hope to seize a sensible and thoughtful reader strongly except by giving expression to that which he has felt in his own life, and everybody will paint the world as he himself has seen it; for this reason we find in the books of a true poet the utterances of his deepest feelings; for this reason we see from his books how he saw the world; for this reason the very soul of a man is manifested in his poetical works, whether he wishes it or not. Of course it is manifested only to him who is able to read, and very few people know how to read a poet.

Yet there are great differences in these manifestations. One poet will express himself in a less intimate manner

than another. Take Shakespeare, for instance. What does Shakespeare the poet tell of Shakespeare the man? Of course we look into a giant-brain, an immense fancy, which reflected the whole world, a mind which followed men and women into the most secret folds and corners of their souls; we must conclude that this man had drunk love and hate to the dregs, that he had seen all the light and all the shadows in nature, for he has written the "Midsummer-Night's Dream" and "King Lear," he knew the most tender beings and the most brutal, for he created Perdita as well as Caliban and Falstaff with his society of revellers; we know this man must have felt the whole depth of human misery and the deepest indignation at the depravity of men; if he had not, he could not have written "King Lear" and "Timon of Athens." Yet all this we can only say at large, in general, and the results of George Brandes' new book, in which he seeks to reconstruct the psychological history of Shakespeare out of his works, seem very questionable. For nowhere in all his plays does Shakespeare show his own face; he is always behind the scenes.

Goethe is quite different. In him the poet's mask is much more transparent. The periods of his development may be sharply traced; on many pages in "Werther," "Faust" and "Wilhelm Meister" the veil is so thin that it seems torn, it is only Goethe himself who speaks, who tells what Goethe felt, what Goethe suffered, what Goethe did and what Goethe thought.

Yet we have so many letters of his, so many notices of his works and of his writings; his contemporaries have told us so much, that we almost know how he passed every day of his life; so we can no longer decide whether we know what we do know from such direct sources or

indirectly from his works. Still, there can be no doubt that his poetry is more personal and subjective than Shakespeare's.

Now Dante's style is incomparably more personal than Goethe's. He is the hero of all his works, not a creature of the brain which he may have modelled after his own likeness, as so many poets have done, but he himself: Dante Alighieri of St. Peter's Gate in Florence. He loved Beatrice. He was in Hell, in Purgatory, and in Paradise. He himself. He tells us so. We cannot doubt it. The word "I" may be encountered on every page of his poems. All his works are "Truth and Fiction" ("Dichtung und Wahrheit") out of his life. Dante's whole poetry is nothing but a poetical autobiography. That is the feature which makes them so vivid, which forces us to such deep participation in his feelings. He is a poet of an unheard-of spiritual egoism, he expresses his opinion on every question, on every personage, on every event. For his own time he must have been modern and actual to the highest degree. For does he not mention himself and all his acquaintances by name? His readers could hear what their late cousin had spoken in the flames of Hell, or what occupied their sister in Paradise.

And for this reason he tells us so much more of his time than his time had to tell of him. There is but one soul in these distant days whose inmost thoughts are laid before us and may be glanced over: the soul of Dante.

And it is for this reason that I said we know him so well. Of course we do. We may hear him speak incessantly and all his words are weighty. But here again one must be able to hear. And it almost makes one despair to see how silly clever men become when they read a poet like Dante, what pedantic methods they adopt, what quibblings

instead of silent enjoyment are the fruits of reading Dante. Nearly all lack the power of synthesis, which is necessary to obtain a true notion of the whole from the parts, to understand the law of a man's being out of a few facts and allusions, and to explain the facts and allusions by the law of his being. But what conclusions are formed instead from single words, from insignificant sentences! What combinations! How literal and superficial are the interpretations of scholars who even make pretence of depth!

Another common mistake is, that all writers on Dante occupy themselves with his opinions instead of inquiring into the state of his soul. I do not mean this word in a religious sense, but I mean the whole interior state, the condition and qualities of the man.

Scholars have written very clever and erudite treatises on the connection of Dante's three chief works—on his "Geistesgang"—but in every one the question is only one of Dante's religious and philosophical opinions; and nowhere, with the single exception of that slight allusion in Carlyle's lecture which I quoted above, is a word said or a thought spent on the deeper question: what a terrible revolution must have taken place in the soul of a man who from such a tender, childlike idyll of innocent love as the "New Life" came to write such a poem of indignation and wrath as the "Divine Comedy."

Most men even say that the time when Dante wrote the "Divine Comedy" was a time of peace and of quietude of soul. People who say so have not the slightest notion of what passes in a poet's soul. For though the man who could write such a work must have been firm and sure of his mission, yet towards the world he was filled with trembling rage and indignation: an

unquenchable ire against men burned within the same man who once, to designate his feeling for all men, had found but the one word "love." Scartazzini in his last book calls Dante a man of one casting—"a nature of granite." Not so. He only became so gradually and in his later years; the casting had once been soft and plastic, which by the most tragic fate became so hard and granite-like.

There is but one work which may be compared to the "Divine Comedy"—the "Faust" of Goethe. Not only are they both poems of humanity, in which the question of man and his destiny is treated, in which we are led "From Heaven through the World to Hell," or the reverse, but the essential resemblance, the reason why I mention "Faust," and not the "Messiad," or the "Paradise Lost," is again the personal and actual element in both poems. They do not treat of Creation and the Fall of Man as Milton does, nor of Christ's Passion as Klopstock; they do not chant cosmic poems of long-past times, but Goethe and Dante remain in the present—they throw open the doors into the mystic regions which are ever around us. Faust is a modern man, the ideal type of a modern man, and Mephistopheles is a highly modern devil; and modern life, that is to say life of Goethe's time, fills every scene of the drama.

The same may be said of Dante. He sings no chant of terror, of a distant Hell to come, no hymn on Paradise, but on Maundy Thursday in the year thirteen hundred, when he himself was just thirty-five years old, he came to the door of the dead and through a whole week about Eastertime he wandered through the realms of the dead and tells us with absolute distinctness and with trembling agitation what he saw and heard; we may check his every step and the events of every hour, exact

plans of the infernal and celestial regions have been designed from his words; every place is described by the most minute comparisons, the whole poem is one of terrific reality. No wonder that the women of Ravenna, when he walked in its streets, stepped aside in fear and pointed to him saying: "That is the man who was down in hell!"

The second feature, which makes Dante appear the most original of all European poets up to his time, is related to the first. Visions of the spiritual realms had been written before his days. He was clearly influenced by Virgil's "Aeneid," and the descent to the subterranean empire in that poem had been borrowed from Homer. There were plenty of Christian visions too. But the descents to hell of ancient times were fables and myths, those of Christian times were legends composed with the object of terrifying unbelievers—the latter almost all of as little poetic worth compared with Dante's vision as the old marionette-plays of "Faust" compared with the tragedy of Goethe.

But Dante surpassed his predecessors not only in artistic qualities, but he gave something thoroughly new: "Where I am sailing none has tracked the sea."

Dante was born in a glorious time, in which two kinds of poetry prevailed: the chivalrous epic and the song of the Minnesingers. He himself began with love-poems, resembling those of the Provençal knights; mediæval religious poetry had influenced him, but his work, if there must be a classification at all, belongs to epic poetry.

And if we compare the deepest of all these epics, the "Parcival," by Wolfram von Eschenbach—out of which Wagner created his musical drama—if we compare this with Dante, what a difference! There is some fine

psychology in Wolfram, some mystic and religious ideas are touched in it, but it is only a touch in passing.

Dante left all known paths and broke through the wall. He projected our own life to the right and to the left into the spiritual world. His epic is different from all others.

He tells no story of knighthood and love, nor the development of some young hero, his adventures, his guilt, and his final happy marriage and arrival in the realm which is destined for him; no, he stood with firm foot in the midst of the real world, and there he looked above and below, he saw into his own soul, and around him; he saw what passed within him and what passed in the souls of other men; he saw the historical catastrophes of his time—the downfall of the mediæval Empire, the triumph and downfall of the Church of Rome, dynasties extinct and town republics in furious revolutions, and he did not choose to tell some story of events happening in this world, and passing through it like a thread on which pearls are strung. No; this whole immense real world began to revolve around him and to arrange itself in strange mystic circles; and in these circles he caught the whole world and constructed it, as it were, anew: the world which had been but a furious vortex of contradictory appearances, of maddening crime, love, hate, destruction, and new birth, arose out of his brain as that cathedral the foundations of which are laid in the darkest and most fearful depths of the human soul, in the pool of all sin and damnation—which rises in endless degrees, scales and spires, filled with men singing to the highest and most radiant glory, to the most godlike trance and ecstasy of which the human soul is capable.

He changed the Visible Church into the Invisible, which

he saw and made visible. The subject of Dante's poem is the whole world.

The world which is so bewildering and incomprehensible to the poor human eye became clear to him and arranged itself in *cosmic* order: "Kosmos," "order," or "beauty," is the Greek word for the world.

For Dante wanders through the interior of the earth, through its centre, up to the other hemisphere—ever upwards through the air, through the crystalline heavens up to the Empyrean, where the white glowing rose of Paradise unfolds itself, where Deity is throned and the eternal revolution of the world is ruled by Love.

It arranged itself for him in a second *moral* order, in three times nine circles, responding to all human qualities, all the glories and all the squalidness of the human soul; and this not in cold and philosophic classifications, but the circles are filled with well-known faces of men, every one of whom had lived; their wailing and their joyful singing resound in them; we find the whole world of Dante's day rearranged in those wonderful circles. With full right he could call it "my sacred song, to which both heaven and earth have set their hand."

But that is not all; there soon appears a still deeper meaning in the poem; at the next glance all this mighty world disappears—the macrocosm becomes a microcosm; we discover that we are no longer in the world, we are in a soul; there is stillness and sighing at the outset; for belief the light from above is wanting. Raging storms come next: these are the passions of the senses, hurrying the soul in every direction; repulsive mire, filth, and moisture follow, where gluttony and intemperance have made the soul obtuse and dark: seething blood boils around murderers and tyrants, and so forth, until the

final obduracy keeps the soul stiff and frozen in the deepest and coldest abyssus of hell. Brighter are the stations of penitence. The sluggard must run, the eyes of the envious are closed by a thread; the gluttonous fast and famish; the over-hasty lie in immovable quiet; this is the penitent soul which denies itself all that had once led it into temptation.

The same symbolism repeats itself throughout the increasing joys of Paradise. We perceive that this immense moving world is a figure, and that every circle does but symbolise a torment, a penance, or a joy of the soul. The whole mystic wandering is but the path of the soul through temptation, penitence, and purgatory to peace, eternal blessedness, knowledge and unity with God.

It has the same meaning as that of Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress," but is expressed by a far mightier artist and poet.

And again a veil drops from our eyes; it is not only the poor Florentine Dante Alighieri who walks here, who saw all this and found peace—it is the Christian, it is Man, who walks the mystic path of the Fall and of Salvation. That is the reason why the week of Easter was chosen for the pilgrimage.

This is the world with all its circles and at the same time a soul, and all that a soul passes through in life; all struggles, all the tortures of penitence, all the joy of enlightenment, it is macrocosm and microcosm in one picture.

Not that the interpreters found all this—they sometimes do find more in a poem than the author ever thought of; but in the "Divine Comedy" all this not only follows clearly out of the whole arrangement and contents of the poem, but Dante himself repeatedly directs our attention to

the fourfold meaning of his work. And not until the immensity of the attempt and the performance has dawned on us do we know how to read the "Divine Comedy" and only then shall we understand why this poem occupies so high a place throughout the world.

Let us again take up the comparison with "Faust."

Both are the poems of humanity, both tell what man is meant for, what is the aim of his earthly life—Dante in the mediæval and Christian sense, Goethe in the modern sense. The whole change of the world effected by six centuries, by the Renaissance, Reformation, Science, and the return of Antique Culture is represented in these two works.

Both treat the problem of the aspiring soul. As the pilgrim, Dante, in the course of the "Divine Comedy," becomes abstract Man, so the same meaning is obviously expressed in the following verses of "Faust":

> Das was der ganzen Menschheit zugetheilt is,
> Will ich in meinen inneren Selbst geniessen,
> Mit meinem Geist das Höchst' und Tiefste greifen,
> Ihr Wohl und Weh auf meinen Busen häufen,
> Und so mein eigen Selbst zu ihren Selbst erweitern!

The difference is that Dante solved the problem as a Christian by penitence and belief, while the modern Faust says, "Wer immer strebend sich bemüht, den können wir erlösen." ("Whosoever unceasingly strives upwards . . . him we can save.") More self-reliant, proud and free is the conception of the modern poet, his God far milder and more loving than the hard and ruthless God of mediæval Christians. He demands no more than a pure and active will, soaring to high aims and free from all egoism.

Both poems have still another no less grand quality in

common; in both the realms of the soul, the depths and the dreams which are in every man's soul are projected into reality. Religion has made at all times, out of the evil and the pure regions in our own soul, heaven and hell, gods and devils, and transplanted them into space.

Many men may deny that heaven and hell exist in space, but no one can deny that they exist within him personally, with their torments and joys, and both have been expressed and painted in this poem, hard as crystal, palpable and vivid, as nowhere else.

Dante has solved the immense problem by uniting both, by leading us through hell and heaven as divisions of space, and still never permitting us to forget that we are in a man's soul; by uniting macrocosm and microcosm as they are united in reality.

But all this seems still more grand, strange and imposing when we trace Dante's life, and see how curiously his path led him to his works, and through his works to the last and greatest of them, how the first conception of the "Sacred Song" dawned in early youth, and filled his soul ever more and more; how his very life led him by every step surely and strongly nearer and nearer to the great vision, how the earthly love for a beautiful woman who died early, was purified to celestial love, and led him, as by a golden thread, through the labyrinth of life; here again the individual love was united with the divine, "the love that rules the world."

His soul lies before us transparent as crystal, unfolded like a rose; we can see the first small root, the little growing buds; we see the first ray that awakes the bud, the first presentiment of coming storms, which will tear the rose and bear its odour and its leaves through all lands and times. We hear in the poem of his first youth that

There one lives waking, whom great loss shall try
And who shall tell the damned in hell's unrest:
I have beheld the hope of all the blest.

And he ends his first work when he is still almost a boy in Florence, hardly ripened to manhood, with words of a strange and wonderful vision and the resolution to work steadfastly, until he shall have told of Beatrice what has never been told of any woman on earth.

We can trace how in the first period of his life all these great dreams dawn on him, how in the second he tries in vain to enter life, to do as others do, to be active and work like ordinary men, how he is thrown back and repulsed, understood by nobody and left alone with his dreams and the world within him, until after unheard-of toils he expresses all this in that ever-sacred song which will appear holy to men of all times and races and eras; and his task thus being accomplished dies.

CHAPTER II

DANTE'S YOUTH

In the small grey Gothic Florence, with its dark and crooked streets, small squares, the fortified castles of noblemen, its many towers, with its churches and ringing bells, its joyous feasts and wild riots, Dante was born.

There was no campanile in Florence at that time, no Uffizi, no Renaissance palaces; the construction of the Palazzo Vecchio and of the cathedral had scarcely been begun; serious, quick-tempered men in strange garbs, in red and green, brown and white gowns with capes and hoods, walked the streets; there in the quarter called after St. Peter's Gate, near the Piazza San Martino, stood the houses of the Alighieri.* There Dante, or with his full name, Durante Alighieri, was born between May 18, and June 17, 1265. The dates given by old writers are contradictory. Some name the year 1266. But from Dante's saying, in the first verse of the "Divine Comedy," that when he undertook his descent to hell he stood in the middle of the path of life, which, according to

* The house which bears the official tablet is certainly not the house in which Dante was born. This has been proved by Witte. But he, too, seems mistaken in designating the house in the Via Santa Margherita as the true one. According to a communication, for which I am indebted to Dr. Davidsohn, the houses of the Alighieri no longer exist.

the Bible, lasts seventy years, and the day of his descent being Good Friday 1300, then from a similar remark in the "Banquet" and various other circumstances, it follows that 1265 was the year of his birth.

That the day fell between May 18 and June 17 is evident from his statement that he was born in the sign of the Twins; for in that year the sun stood in the sign of the Twins during the term aforesaid. Witte may perhaps be right in concluding, from Dante's special veneration for St. Lucia, and from the important influence on his life which he ascribed to that saint, that he was born on the day dedicated to her, May 30. The family certainly was a noble and ancient one, though it did not belong to the "Grandi." It is not likely that Boccaccio and the younger Villani, who expressly says so, should be mistaken in that. It has become a matter of controversy whether Dante was of noble descent or not. In the catalogue of the noble houses contained in the works of Giovanni Villani and Machiavelli the name of the Alighieri is not to be found. But Alighieri was not then a family name—it was the time when family names were first introduced, but were still unusual except those derived from castles and feudal estates—Alighiero was but the name of Dante's father and of his great-grandfather. Perhaps they belonged to another of the great Florentine families. In the "Divine Comedy," Dante himself speaks of the nobility of his blood. His ancestor, Cacciaguida, had been knighted by Emperor Conrad III. He had accompanied the emperor on his crusade and perished in the Holy Land. Besides, the rapidity of Dante's political career, the circumstance that he could marry a lady from the first house of the town, that of the Donati, moreover that the young King of Naples was one of his personal

friends—all these facts seem to prove his noble birth. Later on he became a common citizen in order to be eligible for public office, after the nobility had been excluded. It is worth mentioning that Alighieri is a German name, and most probably derived from "Aldiger," which has about the same significance as the word "Shakespeare," meaning "the ruler of the spear."

The family belonged to the Guelf nobility; they owned houses and estates, but seem to have been deficient in ready money—at least the poet himself undoubtedly was. In the year 1260, as Dante concedes to Farinata in the town of fire, they were banished with the other Guelf nobles, yet his father, Alighiero, seems not to have been among the exiled members of the family. Dante's mother was called Bella, her family name is unknown; she died early, perhaps at his birth. His father married a second time Lapa de' Cialuffi, by whom he had two children, a son Francesco, who outlived the poet by twenty years, and a daughter of unknown name, who married a certain Leone Poggi. Both names, Cialuffi as well as Poggi, are plebeian. His father, too, died early. In the year 1283 he is spoken of as a man dead some years. He seems to have been a man of no importance. In a sonnet addressed to Dante by his future wife's kinsman, and his own friend, Forese Donati, Alighiero is alluded to with undisguised contempt. The poem, however, is of a jocose nature, and Dante himself is also reviled in it.

It is a strange and well-known fact that Dante, who wrote in such a personal style and seldom concealed a name, never mentioned, or even so much as alluded to, any member of his family in all his verse, neither father nor mother, brother nor sister, wife nor children. The only exception, if it can be called one, would be the verse

in the eighth canto of Hell, where Virgil, passing the infernal pool with Dante in the bark of Phlegyas, embraces him and says, "Blessed be she who conceived thee!" We may ask whether he had causes for being silent concerning them, for he mentions his friends, his love, his wife's relations, his ancestor. Yet we know nothing at all about his relations to his family except that his brother occasionally stood surety for his debts, and sometimes lent money to him himself.

We know nothing about Dante's youth, for what is told by Boccaccio is only invention and fine talk. We may fancy whatever we choose. We may think of little Dante as of a fine gifted child, precocious in all his sentiments, perhaps a lonely child craving after love, who grew up in those small streets near the Piazza San Martino, in the neighbourhood of the houses of the mighty families of the Donati and Portinari. We do not know who were his teachers. Though on one occasion he calls Brunetto Latini, the author of the "Tresor," his master, it is not possible to suppose that this man, who had been Chancellor and Prior of the Republic, and who died in 1294, could have been Dante's tutor, as some authors have fancied him to be. It is possible, however, that Dante had heard lectures of his, or had profited by his conversation, but more likely he referred only to Latini's works. From his first work, the "Vita Nuova," we may gather that at the time he wrote it, which was in the third decade of his life, he read and wrote Latin, had mastered Provençal and French, had read the poets of these languages, and had studied Dialectics and Natural Science. It is not impossible that he passed some time at a university, most probably at that of Padua or at Bologna. His serious and inquiring soul certainly in some way or other gained

more than most of the companions of his youth did. But his immense knowledge, his all-comprehensive reading, was, as he himself tells us, not acquired until much later.

We see him, grown up, in the society of young Florentine noblemen, one of whom, the poet Guido Cavalcanti, he calls "the first of his friends." Guido was the son of Messer Cavalcante de' Cavalcanti, of one of the first Guelf families of the town. Sacchetti, the novelist, calls him "a man who, perhaps, had no equal in Florence." Boccaccio, who in the "Decamerone" tells a story about him, says: "Guido di Messer Cavalcante de' Cavalcanti not only was one of the best logicians that the world held, and a surpassing natural philosopher, but he also excelled in beauty and courtesy, and was of great gifts as a speaker, and everything it pleased him to do, and what best became a gentleman, he did better than any other." According to all witnesses he was brave and imperious, full of self-confident pride, reserved, yet of a passionate temper. His father, Cavalcante, was a notorious sceptic and materialist, and as such was seen by Dante in the sixth circle of hell, lying in his fiery coffin; Guido, too, passed for a sceptic. He was ten years older than Dante, and in the latter's youth had great influence on him. He seems to have induced Dante to write the "Vita Nuova" not in Latin but in the popular, that is, the Italian, language. Dante mentions some other friends, but we do not know anything about them.

He must have been shy, diffident, and of a loving, thoughtful and passionate nature; so much we presume from his earliest writings. We may imagine that he was such from that fine picture of Grotto's with its rosy and tender skin, the soft lips and eyes, and yet such firmness about the mouth, such strength in chin and nose. We

must imagine him in the gay feasts in Florence, of which the chroniclers tell, with their baldechins and tribunes hung with wreaths of flowers, the great festival on St. John's Day, when the young men, clad in white, led by the Signor d' Amore, went singing and dancing up the street of Santa Felicità, and women and girls also in wreaths of flowers partook in the festivities, and music and songs and ringing bells filled the air with joyful sounds. It was still the time of fine chivalrous manners, the time of the troubadours and of minstrelsy.

A sonnet of Dante's, which was not included in the "Vita Nuova," allows us to glance, as it were, through a window into a sunny room, into the youthful life of Dante:

> Guido, I wish that Lapo, thou, and I,
> Could be by spells conveyed, as it were now,
> Upon a barque, with all the winds that blow
> Along all seas at our good will to hie.
> So no mischance or temper of the sky
> Should mar our course with spite or cruel slip;
> But we, observing old companionship,
> To be companions still should long thereby.
> And Lady Joan, and Lady Beatrice,
> And her the thirtieth on my roll, with us
> Should our good wizard set, o'er seas to move
> And they three ever to be well at ease,
> As we should be, I think, if this were thus.
>
> (ROSSETTI.)

Does it not seem as if the half-happy, half-longing mood of these enthusiastic youths, revelling in the dreams of love and ardent friendships, were all expressed in this poem? A passage in the "Vita Nuova" confirms what we gather from this sonnet, that these young fellows had numbered sixty of the ladies and maidens of the city, who

to them seemed fairest, and well knew the number by which each of them was designated. Friend Lapo's sweetheart, from some cause or other, is named only in this "jargon."

Another poem of Dante's from the same time is the following:

Last All Saints' holy-day, even now gone by,
I met a gathering of damozels;
She that came first, as one doth who excels,
Had Love with her, bearing her company;
A flame burned forward through her steadfast eye,
As when in living fire a spirit dwells;
So, gazing with the boldness which prevails
O'er doubt, I knew an angel visibly.
As she passed on, she bowed her mild approof
And salutation to all men of worth,
Lifting the soul to solemn thoughts aloof.
In heaven itself that lady had her birth,
I think, and is with us for our behoof:
Blessed are they who meet her on the earth.

(ROSSETTI.)

We know a few of Cavalcanti's love affairs, and we know from the "Vita Nuova" that Dante himself, from his ninth year, adored a girl whom he had seen in a blood-red dress, and who was a year younger than he was, with a boyish shy and happy love.

But most certainly his time was not only devoted to studies, to society and to love, but to the exercise of arms also; indeed, in the year. 1289, Dante, then a man of twenty-four, stood in the ranks, and on July 11 in the same year took part in the battle of Campaldino, where the Florentine Guelfs, 15,000 men strong, defeated the Ghibellines and the people of Arezzo. It was this same battle which Corso Donati, the unruly leader of the

Florentine horse (who afterwards became his relative and his enemy), decided by an act of insubordination, and first made himself a name. What Dante felt in this battle is described by himself in a fragment of one of his letters, quoted by Lionardo Aretino, in which he says: "At this time I was in arms, no longer a boy, and felt much fear and afterwards great joy because of the changeful events of the battle." Some verses in the twenty-second canto of Hell prove that Dante served in the Florentine camp at the siege of the castle of Caprona, which in August of the same year, after a siege of eight days, surrendered to the Florentines and their allies, the Lucchese, on condition that the garrison be permitted to retire. This manysided life, embracing studies and politics, war and pleasures and cultured society, altogether reminds us of the life of ancient Greeks; and, indeed, the Italian cities have more than one feature in common with the famous towns of antiquity, and a culture of similar splendour developed within their walls.

But no less powerful than these must have been the impressions of the great historical events of the time. Of the immense war of the great Emperor against the Popes, the glory and the fall of King Manfred which lay behind him, he certainly must have heard people continually tell in his childhood, the more so as his own house was involved in the catastrophe. He was three years old when young Conradin was defeated in the battle of Tagliacozzo, and beheaded a short time afterwards; and forty years later, as a man of advanced life, he saw a German army with Conradin's bloody head in its banner enter Italy under the Emperor Henry VII. to revenge that cruel deed. . . . in vain, his own last hopes perished with the Emperor's death. He was five years old when all the

world told with terror how the famous captain Guido of Montfort, King Charles' governor in Tuscany, had killed young Prince Henry of England in the Church of Viterbo. In his eighth year the Pope's interdict lay on Florence. No bell was permitted to be rung, no mass was read, no priest gave consolation to the dying—a great event for the boy as well as for the town. He saw riots and discords enough in Florence itself, he listened to the great traditions of the city and its parties; he was a boy of thirteen when the banished Ghibellines returned, fifteen when the Sicilian Vespers took place. In the year 1285 Florence demolished its old walls and built new ones, a sign of its rising power; and in 1289, the year of his military service, Count Ugolino della Gherardesca, with his five sons, died of hunger in the tower of Pisa, and on the opposite Adriatic shore, Francesca da Rimini and her lover fell by her husband's sword. In the year 1290 a terrible fire devastated the town; that same year marked a great epoch in Dante's life, for in it the woman whom he loved died.

CHAPTER III

BEATRICE

About two years later Dante told the story of his love in a strange little book, in which, to a number of poems composed in the course of the preceding ten years, he added a commentary in prose, to explain their meaning and origin. To this book he gave a very remarkable title, calling it the "New Life." It is related in what one should call a "holiday style," simply and touchingly, with finest psychologic details, so true and perfect, that perhaps no one will ever be able fully to understand it who has not experienced similar feelings in early youth. It is the loveliest book created in the Middle Ages; all softness and tenderness, quiet longing, devout love; such a tenderness as is inaccessible to most people of a coarser nature. Nowhere do we find a trace of the future energy, the sharp lines that seem wrought in steel, the future riches of imagination and thought. A sea of events and strange destinies had to roll by him before the author of the "New Life" could become the poet of the "Divine Comedy." Of the poems contained in the book, the first, as Dante himself informs us, was composed in his eighteenth year, that is, in 1283. According to the custom of the time, he sent it to several poets, who answered it. Some of these answers are extant. Among them is a

sonnet by Guido Cavalcanti, which, as Dante tells us, was the true beginning of their friendship. Though we are in a position to state that many events told of in the book took place in reality, still we cannot venture to say that it is simply an "ingenious diary of Dante's love." Dante was a most mysterious person, and all that he tells about himself is mystical and full of secrecy. His soul always walks, as it were, on unearthly paths beside his body. He was a man whose inward life was richer and more intense than that of other men, who very soon lifted himself from the platform of ordinary life to a higher sphere, carrying up with him whatever he touched; in his writings he gave the most detailed descriptions, not of his outward destinies, but of this higher life of his soul; an autobiography of his inward development, not of his personal history on earth; and just because he chose to throw so much light on what passed within him, and so little on his destinies in this world, we must renounce all hope of ever attaining a full knowledge of the latter. The same must be said of the woman whom he loved and made famous as none was made before her. Nay, Beatrice is the most enigmatic creature of all literature. Among the many women made immortal by the poets who loved them, she was exalted to such a height that the dazzling light which the poet shed around her hides her from our glances. All his poetry was for her; his love for her was the golden thread, which now for a time deserted, again firmly grasped, seems drawn across the labyrinth of his life. She, one may say, is the heroine of the "New Life" as well as of the "Divine Comedy." In the first he tells,—and because he tells it, and because in the "Divine Comedy" the same story recurs, we are forced to consider it the most important event of his life, more

important than the revolution in Florence and all others, for a man like Dante must be allowed himself to declare which event has been of highest and most decisive importance for him,—in the "New Life" he tells, I say, how, when still a boy of nine years, he suddenly fell in love with the little girl of eight, whom he saw for the first time in a crimson dress, and how "at that moment the spirit of life, which hath its dwelling in the secretest chamber of the heart, began to tremble so violently that the least pulses of his body shook therewith."

He relates that he saw her many times, until one day, after the lapse of nine years, when she was near eighteen, he saw her "dressed all in pure white, between two gentle ladies older than she," and how, "passing through a street she turned her eyes thither where he stood sorely abashed and by her unspeakable courtesy saluted him with so virtuous a bearing that he seemed then and there to see the limits of all blessedness," and how after this he had that marvellous vision in which he saw her constrained by love to eat his flaming heart, that vision which he described in his first poem. He tells us how that love completely subdued and overcame him, what bliss and what sorrow it caused him, what he did to conceal it, and what consequences followed therefrom. He tells us that he became so weak and so reduced that, when people asked him what was the matter with him, he could not but tell them "Love," "because the thing was so plainly to be discerned in his countenance that there was no longer any means to conceal it." But when they went on to ask, "'And for whose sake has Love done this?' I looked in their faces smiling, and spake no word in return."

Then he proceeds to tell of new visions, in which Love appeared to him, and how, whenever he met her, Love

overpowered him in such a degree "that his body being all subjected thereto remained many times helpless and passive." What her salutation was to him is described in a particular chapter: "I say that when she appeared in any place, and I was allowed to hope for her wonderful salutation, there was no man mine enemy any longer, and such a flame of charity came upon me that most certainly in that moment I would have pardoned whosoever had done me an injury; and if one should then have questioned me concerning any matter I could only have said unto him 'Love,' with a countenance clothed in humility. And what time she made ready to salute me, the spirit of Love, destroying all other perceptions, thrust forth the feeble spirits of my eye, saying: 'Do homage unto your mistress,' and putting itself in their place to obey, so that he who would might then have beheld Love, beholding the lids of my eyes shake." He tells that once, when he met her unawares at a wedding, he trembled so that he was forced to lean his back against the wall. A while after this certain ladies asked him, "To what end lovest thou this lady, seeing that thou canst not support her presence? Now tell us this thing that we may know it, for certainly the end of such a love must be new and worthy of knowledge." Thereupon he composed that celebrated canzone, "Ladies that have Intelligence in Love," which at once placed him among the first poets who sang of love:

Ladies that have intelligence in love,
Of mine own lady I would speak with you;
Not that I hope to count her praises through,
But telling what I may, to ease my mind.
And I declare that when I speak thereof,
Love sheds such perfect sweetness over me
That if my courage failed not, certainly

To him my listeners must all be resigned,
Wherefore I will not speak in such large kind
That mine own speech should foil me, which were base;
But only will discourse of her high grace
In these poor words, the best that I can find,
With you alone, dear dames and damozels:
'Twere ill to speak thereof with any else.

An angel, of his blessed knowledge, saith
To God: "Lord, in the world that Thou hast made
A miracle in action is display'd
By reason of a soul whose splendours fare
Even hither: and since Heaven requireth
Nought saving her, for her it prayeth Thee,
Thy Saints crying aloud continually."
Yet Pity still defends our earthly share
In that sweet soul; God answering thus the prayer.
"My well-belovèd, suffer that in peace
Your hope remain, while so My pleasure is,
There where one dwells who dreads the loss of her:
And who in Hell unto the doomed shall say:
'I have looked on that for which God's chosen pray.'"

My lady is desired in the high Heaven:
Therefore, it now behoveth me to tell,
Saying: Let any maid that would be well
Esteemed keep with her: for as she goes by,
Into foul hearts a deathly chill is driven
By Love, that makes ill thought to perish there:
While any who endures to gaze on her
Must either be ennobled, or else die,
When one deserving to be raised so high
Is found, 'tis then her power attains its proof,
Making his heart strong for his soul's behoof
With the full strength of meek humility.
Also this virtue owns she, by God's will:
Who speaks with her can never come to ill.

Love saith concerning her: "How chanceth it

That flesh, which is of dust, should be thus pure?"
There, gazing always, he makes oath: "For sure,
This is a creature of God till now unknown."
She hath that paleness of the pearl that's fit
In a fair woman, so much and not more;
She is as high as nature's skill can soar;
Beauty is tried by her comparison.
Whatever her sweet eyes are turned upon,
Spirits of love do issue thence in flame,
Which through their eyes who then may look on them
Pierce to the heart's deep chamber every one.
And in her smile Love's image you may see;
Whence none can gaze upon her steadfastly.

Dear Song, I know thou wilt hold gentle speech
With many ladies, when I send thee forth:
Wherefore (being mindful that thou hadst thy birth
From Love, and art a modest, simple child),
Whomso thou meetest, say thou this to each:
"Give me good speed! To her I wend along
In whose much strength my weakness is made strong."
And if, i' the end, thou wouldst not be beguiled
Of all thy labour, seek not the defile
And common sort; but rather choose to be
Where man and woman dwell in courtesy.
So to the road thou shalt be reconciled,
And find the lady, and with the lady, Love.
Commend thou me to each, as doth behove.

(ROSSETTI.)

Dante paid himself a fine compliment by relating in the twenty-fourth canto of Purgatory a conversation which he had in the other world with the soul of the Lucchese poet Buonagiunta Orbicciani, who thus addressed him:

O tell me, do I now see him, whose mind
Sang new-framed rhymes in Florence which began
"O ye who know what love is, ladies kind!"

And I to him: "Behold in me a man
Who when love breathes, listens,—what in me
Love doth dictate, I sing it as I can."

"Now, brother," spake he, "the defect I see
Which me, the Notary and Guittone barred
From that style new and sweet that honours thee.

Well do I now perceive how thy wings hard
After that sweet dictator upwards rose,
Flight which to us the fates did not award.

And who considers will see how remote
Is the new manner from the other style."

The following two sonnets from the "Vita Nuova" are characteristic specimens of the Florentine school:

SONNET IX.

Full many a time there comes into my thought
The melancholy hue which Love doth give,
And such woes come on me that I am brought
To say, "Ah me! doth one so burdened live?"
For Love with me so suddenly hath fought,
That 'tis as though life all my frame did leave;
One living spirit only help hath wrought,
And that remains discourse of thee to weave.
Then I arise, resolve myself to aid,
And pale and wan, and of all strength bereft,
I come to see thee, thinking health to find:
And if on thee my longing eyes are stayed,
My heart, as with an earthquake, then is cleft,
Which makes my pulse leave all its life behind.

(PLUMPTRE.)

SONNET XIV.

So gentle and so fair she seems to be,
My Lady, when she others doth salute,
That every tongue becomes, all trembling, mute,
And every eye is half afraid to see;

She goes her way and hears men's praises free,
  Clothed in a garb of kindness, meek and low,
  And seems as if from heaven she came, to show
Upon the earth a wondrous mystery.
To one who looks on her she seems so kind,
  That through the eyes a sweetness fills the heart,
    Which only he can know who doth it try,
And through her face there breatheth from her mind
  A spirit sweet and full of Love's true art,
    Which to the soul saith, as it cometh, "Sigh."
(PLUMPTRE.)

He proceeds to tell of her father's death and of his own illness, when in feverish dreams he saw her as one dead; with the exception of but few outward events he tells the psychological story of his love—of the events within his soul. It is the inner world that is his object, and in the mirror of the soul strange transformations are possible. The image of the beloved woman grows to such a height that the heavens resound with her praise, that God Himself speaks of her, and that at her death Dante breaks out in the words of Jeremiah: "How doth the city sit solitary, that was full of people! How is she become as a widow, she who was great among the nations!" He then tells how it happened that after her death he had almost betrayed her and loved another young woman, who had looked down on him, sitting in sadness, from the window opposite, gazing upon him with a face full of deepest pity. At last, however, conquering that new passion, he turned back to the loving memory of Beatrice, and then speaks of a last wondrous vision, concluding with the following words:

"Wherefore if it be his pleasure through whom is the life of all things, that my life continue with me for a few years, it is my hope that I shall yet write concerning her

what hath not before been written of any woman. After the which may it seem good unto him, who is the Master of Grace, that my spirit should go hence to behold the glory of its lady, to wit, to that blessed Beatrice who now gazeth continually on His countenance, *qui est per omnia sæcula benedictus.*"

One thing the "Vita Nuova" and the "Divina Commedia" have in common: the terrible intensity of all sensation. The whole book is the expression of exalted feelings. Not that the precocity of love strikes us as so very remarkable. Lord Byron fell vehemently in love in his sixth year, and many instances of a similar precocity could be quoted from life. But the "Vita Nuova" betrays an inner life of an incredible intensity. This love not only clutches and rules Dante's soul, but it overflows the soul's limits, and breaking all personal bonds fills the streets with light, heightens the colour of the sky and gilds the churches of Florence. It pervades the world in mystic ways; the rest of mankind vanish from his eyes and lose all importance; he is alone with his love. They fill the world to the brim, and "beyond the sphere that spreads to widest space," even God and His angels have to speak of her.

The graceful little girl whom, on that memorable Ascension-day, he saw for the first time has imperiously mastered Dante's soul, has given a new shape to his world; and to-day, while the real resounding world, that surrounded him, has long become a shadow and a dream, his dream-world is still real.

The world within him with its Sabbath-air, its pure sky of serenest blue, with its touching sorrow and soft melody of love, lies a reality before us in the "Vita Nuova"; and the girl who has evoked this world has become a



Brogi photo.

DANTE

OF THE XV CENTURY

National Museum, Naples

glorified mystery, and perhaps the highest and greatest illustration of that famous verse of Goethe's which is much more difficult to understand than to quote:

Das Ewig-Weibliche zieht uns hinan.

No artist has been more perfectly imbued with the spirit of this wonderful book than Dante Gabriel Rossetti. The pictures which he created to illustrate it appear to me fitly to embody the pure and passionate world of the "Vita Nuova." But Dante's youthful plan was not carried out so quickly as he had expected. Indeed, it took him his whole life to do it, and there is something overpowering in the thought how literally those last lines came true. But the path was not so even and straight as he seems to have imagined in writing them. Fate, it is true, knows no byways and no circuits, however they may appear to us and to men. The way we are led by it is the only possible way to fulfil our destiny. In the "Banquet" some slight mention is made of Beatrice, but after this not a word is spoken about her until Dante saw her once more in the earthly Paradise. It was Beatrice to whom, after long years, he became indebted for all the glories he was called upon to see. It was the spirit of his half-forgotten love who, out of pity for Dante, lost in the dark wood of life, sent Virgil's shade to his rescue. It was at her bidding that Virgil led him through Hell, where he was shown the souls in pain; then over the mountain of Purgatory up to the garden of Eden. In Eden Beatrice receives him with reproachful love and with him ascends through the nine heavens to the Empyrean, where, like an immense white glowing rose, the celestial Paradise unfolds itself, and where, around the holy Trinity, around God himself, the spirits of the

blessed are sitting, and the angels are flying from leaf to leaf like golden bees. Here Beatrice, too, has her place in the inmost row on the fourth seat; the first is St. Mary's, the second Eve's, the third Rachael's, the fourth is Beatrice's; in the opposite row, among the sainted men, John the Baptist has the first place facing that of the Virgin; on the fourth, corresponding to Beatrice's, sits St. Augustin.

The question necessarily forces itself on every reader's mind, who was this Beatrice? What daring mood could induce Dante to assign such a place to the girl he loved? Yet more daring still, he lets her appear in the terrestrial Paradise in the procession of the triumphant Church:

Under a heaven thus fair as I narrate
  Did four-and-twenty elders slowly move,
In pairs, with fleur-de-lys incoronate,
  And they all sang, "Oh, blessed thou above
All Adam's daughters, blessed too for aye
  Be all thy glorious beauties that we love!
And when the flowers and other verdure gay,
  That on the other bank grew opposite,
Of those elect ones no more felt the sway,
  As in the heaven there follows light on light,
Four living creatures after them drew nigh,
  Each wearing crown of leafage green and bright.
Plumed with six wings were all that company;
  Of eyes their plumes were full, and Argus' eyes,
Were they yet living, might with those eyes vie.

The space within the four a car enrings,
  That on two wheels in triumph moveth on,
Which harnessed to his neck a Gryphon brings.
  And his two wings, on this and that side one,
Are stretched midway, three bands on either side,
  So that by cleaving he wrought harm to none.

In vain the eye their height to follow tryed;
So far as he was bird, all gold his frame,
And white the rest, with vermeil modified.

(PLUMPTRE.)

The Gryphon, whose wings reach into heaven, is Christ, indicating His double nature; the car, drawn by Him, is His Church, and on His car stands, veiled, in regal attitude, Beatrice.

It could not remain doubtful to anybody that this meant more than a simple meeting with the girl, who died on June 9, 1290. The Middle Ages more than any other were the times of allegory and symbolism. Beatrice standing on the car, that represents the Church, must be the living essence of the Church; so much is clear. Scholars do not agree on a more precise definition. Some maintain that she stands for Theology, some that she is Active Intelligence, others propose Revelation, Efficient Grace, Inspiration, Belief, and the like; all of which notions were sharply distinct in mediæval theology. To us, however, who cannot treat such conceptions as concrete and clearly defined things, who are no realists in the sense of mediæval philosophy, to us all these seem, as it were, to melt into each other like clouds, without clear limits or contents. Or let us rather say, they are words by which men vainly try to define different utterances of the same difficult psychological fact. It is sufficient to say, Beatrice in the "Divine Comedy" indicates the Highest that Dante knew, the essential spirit of the Christian Church as he saw it, the highest illumination which Divine Grace concedes to mankind.

But who was the earth-born woman who was transfigured to such a symbol? Who was she, glorified as never a woman before her, and allowed to conduct her

lover through all heavens, who was made the symbol of the ray of heavenly light given to mankind? It is easy to conceive that this question has incited the curiosity of Dante's own time as well as of all following generations.

The answer was soon given. Messer Giovanni Boccaccio, who in the second half of the fourteenth century gave lectures by appointment of the Republic in Florence on the "Divine Comedy"—the first Dante professor—declared that he had heard "from a trustworthy person" that she was no other than young Beatrice, the daughter of the noble gentleman and neighbour of the Alighieri, Messer Folco di Ricovero Portinari, who married Messer Simone de' Bardi and died at the age of twenty-four in the year 1290. Five centuries of men accepted this assertion without doubt or criticism, through five centuries the daughter of the Portinari enjoyed a glory not due to her—though this seems a matter of small importance considering that even of this Beatrice we know little more than the name. There were a few persons who doubted it; the Franciscan monk, Francesco da Buti, for instance, who shortly after Boccaccio lectured on Dante in Pisa, and who declared Beatrice to be a totally different person, of the same name; but his opinion did not prevail. Possibly, too, he only alluded to the Beatrice of the "Divine Comedy."

We to-day know that all that Boccaccio says must be considered with caution, that he was ever writing and thinking novels, that he had no idea of criticism, was of boundless negligence, and very talkative. The only passage corroborating his evidence occurs in a manuscript of the Commentary by Dante's son Pietro, and is strongly suspected of having been forged.*

* This is the so-called "Codex Ashburnham." On this point see

It seems unquestionable that Dante's Beatrice never married. Those who maintained that she had, alleged in proof of their opinion the fifteenth chapter of the "New Life," where it is told that she, with other ladies, accompanied a newly-wedded bride to her husband's house, saying that only married women were allowed to be present on such occasion. But this is nothing but an arbitrary supposition, which never has been proved. I, for my part, am sure that these ladies simply were bridesmaids, unmarried women, who then as well as to-day and, in fact, long before that time, used to accompany the bride to the altar and then to her husband's home. This passage, therefore, seems to prove the very contrary, that Beatrice, at least at the time when this event happened, was still unmarried.

But, more than such paltry evidence, the utter want of inward probability seems decisive to me. To a man who loved as Dante did, the marriage of his beloved would have been such a terrible shock that some sign of it, some allusion to the event surely would be found in the "New Life." Some change would have to be noted in the tone in which he speaks of Beatrice, who certainly must have become an altered being in his eyes from the moment of her marriage. If she had been a married woman already when he first knew her this might have been different, but he had known her as a little girl of eight, her marriage to another man must have been the greatest event in the history of his love; but not a word is said on it, not a word betrays the terrible disappointment it must have been to him; quite the contrary, the more he proceeds the happier

Scartazzini, "Dantologia," p. 77; Moore, "Studies in Dante," second series, pp. 150, 151; and particularly Gietmann, "Beatrice," pp. 146–151.

he seems to become. And then, a man's love for a woman who is married to another man may be something very high and beautiful, but the more it is so the more vehement will be the moral conflict in the lover's heart, more especially in a heart so devout and earnest as was Dante's; there cannot have been that deep, quiet, and pure joy that pervades the "New Life." We need but compare how dark and burning Dante has painted such a love, which he himself probably experienced in his later days, in the famous episode of Francesca and Paolo.

There are authors who against this allege the poetical fashion of the time, to praise married women only; all troubadours and minstrels did so. That is most true, but what troubadour ever did celebrate his mistress as Dante did? His style of praising her is entirely different from that of the troubadours, however indebted he may be to them in many technical respects. There is a moral element in Dante's love-poetry which is unknown in common minstrelsy. Dante's love is not only a torment and a joy, but he calls it "holy"; he is not only made happy or unhappy, as every lover is by his love, but he becomes devout and pure. Not the slightest trace of anything similar can be found in the poetry of the Provençals. Besides, their lays leave small doubt of their being addressed to married women, while the very tone of the "New Life" makes it quite unbelievable. No more maidenly form can be imagined than Beatrice, no feeling can be more pure, more peaceful and elevated than Dante's. And why should Dante, who was an exceptional being in all respects, not have made an exception in this too? Yet it cannot even be maintained that such a love and its poetical glorification is contradictory to the literary custom of the time. Lyrical poetry in the Middle Ages was occupied only with

love for women married to other men, but in the numerous epic poems and tales of the period which possibly were read still more, love to a damozel, to an unmarried princess is the general theme, and the death or the wedding of the lovers is the story's end. Whenever the poets expressed their personal adventures or feelings, they sang of married women or pretended to do so; but whenever they told stories which they wanted to make seem true to the reader and to catch his interest, then they were forced to imitate real life, in which wooing and wedding at all times played an important part, and they invented or adorned tales of dangerous courtships and difficult marriages, and only sometimes, as in the tales of Tristan and Isolde, of Lancelot and Guinevere, tell of unlawful love. If we were to draw any conclusions from the favourite themes of the time, we should even be forced to infer—just as from the usual popular novels of the day—that love-matches were the only ones existing. The truth is that customs, opinions, and expressions change, but not the fundamental impulses of men, and the literature of a period only represents what occupied the minds of men, what seemed possible or desirable to them, and therefore never gives a perfect picture of the real state of things, unless due allowance is made for this difference. To an unbiased critic the time of the troubadours will not appear to have been so very different from our own. Love-songs were the fashion, and many poets sang of love who had never really felt it. It is easy to recognise this from the poems themselves, and as Diez says, "to distinguish at the first glance the naïve tenderness of Bernart de Ventadour from the cold artificiality of Arnaut Daniel." It was the fashion to address one's love-songs to a married lady of the highest rank possible; the object, too, was selected according to fashion. In cases

when the songs were the fruits of real passion, dramas and tragedies were not wanting. There was a sufficient number of husbands enamoured of their own wives, and most at least were prone to jealousy. If we glance now at our own literature, we shall find just the same; there are few poems of our lyrical poets addressed to their own wives, but many praising women whose lovers they were or desired to be. At all times a commendable hesitation may have prevented poets from singing aloud of a love of which all the world knew, a fact which cannot but be distasteful to persons who are tenderly and deeply in love.

But Beatrice never was Dante's wife, only a girl whom he adored. And we need not even go so far to prove that such an adoration expressed in poetry was not so very exceptional. Dante's friend, Cino da Pistoja, in one of his sonnets, proposes the question whether it be better to love a girl or a married woman, saying that he would think him a fool who, having the choice of both, would decide for the married woman. That certainly proves that to love a girl was then no more an unheard-of thing in a poet than it is now. But if no other man had dared to infringe the laws of fashion and sing of a maid, no rule of fashion can be alleged against Dante; no work of his followed the fashion; they stand aloof from all works of his contemporaries. There is no analogous work to the "Vita Nuova" or to the "Divina Commedia." All his works were "Nova," and he who dared to speak of his own appearance in heaven and hell would have been bold enough to sing of a maid that appeared so pure and wondrous to him as Beatrice, even if no other man would ever have attempted a similar thing. Scartazzini is quite right in saying, "If we are informed about the troubadours, we are still better informed about Dante, and know that his judgment in

moral and sexual matters was severer not only than that of most of his contemporaries, but even than that of most men of our days." That does not impeach the fact that this passionate man, in the time of his aberration, which he himself condemned so severely afterwards, had loved married women also.

We know nothing of Dante's loves; we do not know whether his love was ever successful or unrequited. But we know that he has celebrated other women in after years—at least one—and that nobody who never had felt the like himself could have painted the sinful love of Francesca and Paolo so touchingly, in so vivid colours, and above all so compassionately as Dante has done in the fifth canto of Hell. There are things which nobody can paint without having gone through. Only a poet who had passed through such dark and tragic experiences as Lord Byron could find the strong words in "Heaven and Earth" which so vividly remind us of that dark love-scene in the second circle of Hell:

> Great is their love who love in sin and fear.

But at the time of the "Vita Nuova" Dante deemed himself a pure child of God, not yet was he lost in the dark wood of life—it was the time of which Beatrice speaks to the angels:

> Not only as the wheels majestic sweep
> That guide each seed to its appointed end,
> According as the stars their concert keep,
> But through the bounteous graces God doth send,
> Which have such lofty vapours for their rain,
> No mortal can his glance so far extend,
> *He*, when his *New Life* he did first attain,
> Potentially was such that every good
> In him had power a wondrous height to gain.
>
> (PLUMPTRE.

The ruling experience of such a time, that in after years appeared so pure and godly to him, cannot have been the love for another man's wife.

At any rate, it was not Beatrice dei Bardi, *née* Portinari.* Who she was we do not know, and probably never shall. The name of the woman that was glorified more than any other seems by a curious coincidence to have been lost for ever.

The question has been put whether she returned Dante's love. It seems to have been the case by some allusions of Dante and by his whole way of treating the subject. Yet the fact is of little importance to us. Perhaps she was but a pretty Florentine girl, not even capable of appreciating a man like Dante, a girl who perhaps passed him with a slight pity and nodding of her head, though this is not likely. For only the first poems complain of her cruelty, the later are all joy and loving admiration. But, as I said, it is a matter of little importance to us; for, whoever she was or whatever felt, on him she has made such an impression that for her sake

> He stepped apart from out the common herd.

The image which remained of her in the poet's brain is essential, for we know her only by that. She has been

* Her christian-name seems to have been Beatrice, though one might doubt it. For Beatrice means "she who makes blessed," and in the place where Dante first speaks of her, he calls her "the glorious lady of my mind who was called Beatrice by many *who knew not wherefore*." I was myself of this opinion, that Dante only chose this significant name for her, and I have expressed this opinion in my little book on the "Vita Nuova," but Lieutenant-Colonel Pochhammer called my attention to the fact that if Beatrice were a solemn and allegoric name, Dante never would have used the tender abbreviation of "Bice," and spoken of her in the same breath with "Vanna" (Jennie), Guido's love. The passage quoted above probably means, that when she was baptized the name of Beatrice was chosen, not without Divine inspiration.

praised in innumerable songs, painted by countless artists —yet we do not know who she was nor how she appeared.

This ignorance and the evident symbolism of the "Divine Comedy" were the causes that led some authors to express doubts whether she existed at all, and to declare the Beatrice of the "New Life," too, to have been only an allegory. The principal authors of recent date who have maintained this interpretation in pleasant concordance of opinion have come to these results: Gabriele Rossetti, that Beatrice indicates the Roman Empire, while Father Gietmann proves just the contrary, that she means the Roman Church; Francesco Perez declares her to be "Active Intelligence," and Professor Bartoli maintains that she is simply the Ideal Woman.

Many have replied to this with the ironical questions why Dante, just at the age of nine, should have encountered the Roman Empire, aged eight, in the streets of Florence, and why the Roman Empire laughed so merrily whenever it saw him, and how the Church could ever go to Church, and how it was possible that the Active Intelligence died precisely on June 9, 1290; and a hundred similar things which are not to be understood. One "Idealist" refutes the other, and hardly any has found adherents.*

All these writers may be great scholars, but they are no psychologists; they seem to have no idea of what passes in a poet's brain, and how actual events of his life may be transformed in his fancy. Those who think Dante's language too rapturous and exalted do not know

* A more detailed refutation of these interpretations may be found in my translation of the "Vita Nuova" ("Das Neue Leben des Dante Alighieri." Otto Hendel; Halle, 1897).

the feeling and the language of pure and enthusiastic passion, for such Dante wrote the verse,

Intender non la può chi non la prova.

The language of one of the greatest German poets, Friedrich Hölderlin, is quite as exalted, though dimmed with the morbid element of his impending madness; and if we did not know so surely that the Diotima of his poems was a real woman, Madame Gontard, the wife of a banker in Frankfort, perhaps professors in time to come would declare her only an abstract ideal and an allegory. If we accept at all the insipid discrimination between sensual and spiritual love, which Nietsche rightly says nobody who ever loved truly could make, even if we accept it at all, then, in the fifth canto of Hell, where Dante's theme is not only sensual but sinful love, and where Francesca speaks of Paolo's love for her fair body, this love is called "Amor che al cor gentil ratto s' apprende" ("Love that so easily befalls a noble heart")—the same quotation from Guido Guinicelli, of which Dante makes use to characterise his love for Beatrice in the "New Life."

And how is it that Dante, who always and everywhere, in the "Banquet" as well as in the "Divine Comedy," warns the reader not to interpret his words too literally, but expressly calls his attention to the symbolic meaning, failed to do this in the "New Life?" As for me, those insipid interpretations would mar and spoil the joy I feel in reading the "New Life." What is the use of knowing that a rose which we believed to be a real, fresh and dewy rose, is only a paper imitation, painted and scented? Why should Dante not have been a man of sound heart and senses? And how could he write such beautiful

love-poems if he never loved a real woman? I at least, and many others, when reading the "New Life," have the psychological certainty that the rose is a true one, and that is sufficient. Who prefers the artificial rose may stick to it; that is a matter of taste and intuition; a final and decisive argument is impossible.

But, having once made certain of this, we may say in quite a different sense: Yes, Beatrice is a symbol; Beatrice in the "New Life" and in the "Divine Comedy" are the same. Dante did love a real woman, and that woman was Beatrice, was the light of Heaven itself. And the Beatrice of the "Divine Comedy" is no other than the beloved of his youth. Dante certainly never doubted for a moment that Virgil, who in the sacred epic stands for human wisdom or the like, once lived as a real Roman poet; he was sure that Leah and Rachel, who in his poem, thereby following the interpretation given in a letter of Pope Gregory I., symbolise active and contemplative life, were once living girls in Judæa of old; he himself in the "Comedy" represents man in general, and yet was Dante Alighieri the Florentine poet; the nine heavens in the "Banquet" denoted the nine sciences, and still in his opinion continued to turn around the earth. Even so, Beatrice was at the same time the Florentine girl he had loved in early days, and the symbol of divine love in Heaven. In his works we trace all the steps and phases of her glorification. At first she was but an earth-born woman he loved, but the world is full of symbols and symbolism, and all poetry is based on this fact. The more poetical a man's soul is, the better is he enabled to see it. We cannot speak without using figures and symbols. Every flower that grows and fades is a symbol of the fate of man, of art, of nations, of the globe itself.

Think of all the similes in the gospel, of the million of figures in poetry! There is no phenomenon in the world which could not be made an exemplification of a deeper meaning. Why should a lily or a sower be a better symbol than a beautiful human being?

There is no great poetry without symbolism. The purer a poet receives life, and the fuller it falls in his soul's mirror, the richer in meaning will his work be. But if he try to force it into too distinct invented allegory, life will oppose such violence and the clear sharp images will become dark and misleading. For the world is a great manifest mystery, and the greatest of all wonders is our getting so accustomed to them that we no longer see that we are walking in wonderland.

We have no need of such violent interpretations. We need not force more symbolism into Dante's poetry than it contains, and we shall find it but the more strikingly beautiful and mysterious for its being natural and clear. The real woman that Beatrice was, appeared to him as something so high and as a reflection of something higher still; just as he expressed it in the "Divine Comedy," where she looks into the face of God and he into hers to catch the reflection of Divine Love, which in itself would be unbearable to him. She seemed to be the sweetest thing that God could create, a thing of heavenly nature that had returned to its source, a lovely wonder, a "novem," a "nine" whose root is the "three," that is, the Holy Trinity, and she a thing that the Holy Trinity created, in the loving purpose to make mankind blessed by her presence. All this is but the exaltation of a lover's trance and will not appear so very exaggerated to anybody who ever really loved; it is as natural as that the town seemed void and empty to him when she died.

But what now follows is a psychic phenomenon that resembles a painter's choice of the fairest and noblest woman he knows to sit to him for a picture of the Blessed Virgin. So Dante chose the fairest and noblest woman he knew to become the symbol of Divine Love and Grace.

She was to him an emanation from heaven, a concentration of all that is beautiful; she must of necessity become a symbol of the highest that he knew. As Sir Philip Sidney said of "Stella," whose reality has never been doubted,* that

> Virtue, if it once met with our eyes,
> Strange flames of love it in our souls would raise;
> But—for that man with pain this truth descries
> Whiles he each thing in sense's balance weighs,
> And so nor will nor can behold those skies
> Which inward sun to heroic mind displays—
> Virtue of late, with virtuous care to stir
> Love of herself, took Stella's shape, that she
> To mortal eyes might sweetly shine in her.
>
> (From *Astrophel and Stella*, Sonnet XXV.)

What the inner sense gives to heroic souls the beloved woman gives to her lover, but her beauty will make it manifest to unheroic souls too. That is the language of a high-minded and enthusiastic time.

This it was that passed in Dante's soul. A common mind—and such he would have had if those commentators were in the right—would have invented some ideal woman for his allegory; that is the common way. But Dante chose a living woman whom he glorified.

Here as ever he dared to draw from life. He did not invent some female figure to embody a divine meaning,

* "Stella" was married to Lord Rich in 1581. Sidney married in 1583. The sonnets in all other respects differ very much from those of Dante.

he saw the divine meaning embodied in the living woman. And when she died and became a spirit the thing was rendered still easier. For now that she was a spirit, dwelling in the invisible world, and the corporeal garment was put off, he had but to heighten her rank, not to change her substance. He makes this quite clear in the verses of the "New Life":

> But from the height of woman's fairness, she,
> Going up from us with the joy we had,
> Grew perfectly and spiritually fair;
> That so she spreads even there
> A light of love which makes the angels glad,
> And even unto their subtle minds can bring
> A certain awe of profound marvelling.
>
> (Rossetti.)

She had been a mysterious being to him already in the "Vita Nuova." The "New Life" is no common love-story. In a mind so strange and extraordinary as Dante's was, every event reflected itself in a strange and original way. He nowhere speaks of his desire to kiss her, to wed her, though he certainly desired it, for he tells how the Florentine ladies smiled at his timidity, but there he only speaks of the impression which her appearance made on his soul; the sense of happiness, which makes him see the whole creation as a world of blessedness and joy, until he perceives that in her he loves the Universe. *Love* itself, the powerful ruler of beings, rules him through her.

And even when raised to Paradise she never ceased to be his former love! Fancy the poet sitting at his desk or walking in a country lane and working at the "Divine Comedy"; the more vividly he saw before his spiritual eyes the shape of the woman so soon lost and so long

deplored, the more his language, when speaking of the great symbol on the Divine Car, took the form of earthly love. Compare the verses in which he describes their meeting in Eden:

Oft have I seen how all the east was crowned
  At very break of day with roseate hue,
And all the sky beside serener found;

And the sun's face o'erclouded came in view,
  The vapours so attempering its powers,
That the eye gazed long while, nor weary grew:

And so, enveloped in a cloud of flowers,
  Which leapt up, scattered by angelic hands,
And part within and part without sent showers,

Clad in white veil with olive-wreathed bands,
  A lady in a mantle bright and green
O'er robe of fiery glow before me stands.

And then my spirit, which so long had been
  Without the wonder that had once dismayed,
When that dear presence by mine eyes was seen,

Though nothing more to vision was displayed,
  Through secret power that passed from her to me
The mighty spell of ancient love obeyed.

Soon as I stricken stood, in act to see,
  By that high power that pierced me with his dart
Ere yet I passed from out my boyhood free,

I to the left with wistful look did start,
  As when an infant seeks his mother's breast
When fear or anguish vex his troubled heart,

To say to Virgil: "Trembling, fear-opprest,
  Is every drop of blood in every vein;
I know that old flame's tokens manifest."

And she herself later on tells the angels who plead for him:

Awhile my face was strong his life to build,
And I, unveiling to him my young eyes,
In the straight path to lead him on was skilled.

So soon as I had reached the point where lies
Our second age, and I my life had changed,
Me he forsook, and chose another prize.

And *when I had from flesh to spirit ranged*,
And loveliness and virtue in me grew,
I was to him less dear and more estranged.

(PLUMPTRE.)

I believe these verses should leave no doubt on the double nature of Beatrice.

At the close of "Faust" Goethe made use of several motives of Dante's, though in a colder and paler form, for the glowing ecstasy of Dante, to whom all mortal things were in truth but similes, was not given to him. There we find the celebrated verse which I quoted before: "Das Ewig-Weibliche zieht uns hinan." Pochhammer and Bulle have both called our attention to the fact that this verse, almost Goethe's last, which is so seldom understood, is to be found among the last verses of Dante too, in his adieu to Beatrice:

Lady, in whom my hope breathes quickening air,
And who for my salvation didst endure
To pass to Hell and leave thy footprints there,

Of all mine eyes have seen with vision pure,
As coming from thy goodness and thy might,
I the full grace and mercy know full sure.

Thou me, a slave, to freedom didst invite,
By all the means and on the glorious way
Thy power alone could work such ends aright.

Still keep for me thy bounteous love's display
So that my soul, which owes its health to thee,
May, pleasing thee, be freed once from this clay!

With these words he takes leave of her, St. Bernard steps into her place, and through the mediation of the Virgin leads him to see the countenance of God. Now all the prophecies of the "New Life" were fulfilled. As his own soul rose ever higher and higher by mysterious ways, so he raised her, who was his leading star, higher still. He raised her—but by a strange delusion, which seems an optic law of all poetry, he fancied that it was she who elevated him. And who is to say what is delusion, what reality, in such mysterious phenomena?

That is the "Geistesgang" of Dante, as far as Beatrice is concerned, and in those dry interpretations the link is torn, the path destroyed, on which Dante led his "blessed giver of bliss," and himself, too, from the love for a beautiful young Florentine woman—as she was in the "New Life"—to that high Beatrice who is seen standing on the car of Christ, who is light itself, and sits enthroned at the Virgin's side in the flaming rose of Paradise.

His whole life was given up to this path; but he transposed the mystic meeting in the other world from the late years, when he described it, into the Easter week of the year 1300. We do not know why; the year certainly was an important and decisive one for him, and the interval of ten years that lies between it and Beatrice's death was an agitated and eventful time, that formed the second period of his life.

CHAPTER IV

DANTE AND FLORENCE

Deep despair seems to have hovered over Dante's soul after the death of Beatrice, at least for the few following years. History has little to tell us about him, yet we may broadly trace the ways he now took, and which afterwards appeared to him false and erroneous, and in a certain sense may have been so, but which for his development certainly were as necessary as all others. He himself says in the "Banquet," in the thirteenth chapter of the second treatise: "When the first joy of my soul was lost, I remained in such sorrow that no consolation could bring comfort to me. Yet after a certain time, as neither my own nor foreign consolation was of avail to me, my spirit, that longed for healing, found rescue in the way in which other disconsolate persons had found relief before. And I began to read that book of Boethius, which is not known to many, and with which he comforted himself in prison and in banishment." Then he proceeds to speak of other books he read, and tells what he thought and wrote of them, and how "he had seen strange things as in a dream before," "and as it often happens that a man goes forth to seek silver and without intention finds gold, which a hidden cause, perhaps not without Divine Providence, puts in his way, so did I, who sought to console myself, find

not only comfort for my tears but a knowledge of authors, sciences and books, and considering these I judged that Philosophy, who was the mistress of all these authors, sciences and books, must needs be something very high. And I fancied her in the shape of a noble woman, and I could not think of her otherwise but as of a being full of gentle pity, and my sense of truth saw her with such pleasure that it scarce could ever turn from her. And from this imagination I began to go thither, where she revealed herself in reality, that is, to the schools of convents and to the disputations of the learned, so that in a short time, perhaps in thirty months, I began to feel so much of her sweetness that my love for her expelled and destroyed every other thought."

So we hear from his own mouth that, after the death of his beloved, Dante devoted himself to studies, and that he did this with all the vehemence of his temper. In the first chapter of the third book he says: "Oh how many nights did pass, when the eyes of other men were closed in slumber while mine looked fixedly and immovably on the dwelling-place of my love!" And again in the ninth chapter: "In that same year I so weakened the spirits of vision by too much reading that the stars seemed to me surrounded by a kind of white mist, and only by long repose in dark and cool places, and by cooling the eyeballs with limpid water, did I recover the diseased power, so that it returned to its former state of health."

Dante never gave up his studies; he became one of the most learned men of his time; one who had read all works of importance and was master of all its knowledge. He seems to have made one farther step: we know from a trustworthy report that Dante for some time was a novice of the Order of St. Francis, but left the cloister

without taking orders. In the subterranean journey he tells that around his waist he wore the cord by which he for a time had thought to master the "pard," that is, the spirit of lust. There is some probability that this may have happened in those years, but possibly, too, it was much later. In those years of literary occupation he probably composed the book written in the memory of his youthful love.

Yet dimly, dimly through the dark mist which the length of six hundred years and the utter want of notices have spread over Dante's life, we may recognise that his retirement from the world was not of long duration. The "ways of error," with which he so passionately reproached himself in after years, began and led him into that dark forest with the description of which the "Divine Comedy" opens, and out of which he was saved by his passage through the realms of the dead. He returned to life and entered its arena with all the ardent activity of his mind. But "Experience sullies"—he, too, came to know that.

In the "Vita Nuova" we are informed of a second love, against which he fought, and which is described with no less grace and loveliness than the first.

Subtle inquiries have been made by interpreters who attempted to discover who the lady of this second love may have been, whether she was Philosophy or even, as Scartazzini will have it, Dante's wife. We do not know it. It may have been some other woman for whom he perhaps might have felt a passing inclination in the time between the death of Beatrice and his own marriage. Scartazzini's supposition that the "donna della finestra" was Dante's wife seems quite untenable, for Dante everywhere and always avoided speaking of the latter, so that this would be the only instance of his mentioning her,

That is impossible in itself, and, besides, it would have been done in another manner.*

But we know that Dante for a time led rather a dissolute life, which cannot well have been in another period, and which probably was but another way in which he tried to deaden his despair at the loss of Beatrice. There is a sonnet that Guido Cavalcanti addressed to him, in which he says:

I come to thee by daytime constantly,
  But in thy thoughts too much of baseness find;
  Greatly it grieves me for thy gentle mind,
And for thy many virtues gone from thee.
It was thy wont to shun such company,
  Unto all sorry concourse ill inclined:
  And still thy speech of me, heartfelt and kind,
Had made me treasure up thy poetry.
But now I dare not, for thine abject life
  Make manifest that I approve thy rhymes;
Nor come I in such sort that thou mayst know.
  Ah! prythee, read this sonnet many times:
So shall that evil one who bred this strife
  Be thrust from thy dishonoured soul and go.

(Rossetti.)

* It is true that Dante himself says in the "Banquet" that the object of this second love was Philosophy. But I do not think we can believe him, the more so as he wrote this passage at a time when he thought himself obliged to be ashamed of his love-songs, and declared all of them to be only allegories. Those who are of the opinion that Beatrice is a mere symbol have, of course, always alleged that place in their favour. How little is proved by it I have tried to state in my work on the "Vita Nuova," in the notes to chapter xxiv. Indeed, few authors trusted Dante's explanation in this matter; nor did he give it with much skill, for in the "Vita Nuova" he had called this second love "faithless," "accursed," and "vile," and in the "Banquet" it is called a "love of heavenly power," and one originated by Divine influence. The reverse order were possible, but thus this late interpretation, authentic though it be, seems but an unsuccessful and unskilful attempt to hide the real state of things

This poem would not be sufficient proof, for friends are apt to be susceptible, and if a man does not live according to their counsel and theories, they will soon find that he is on the way to perdition. A man like Dante could well walk paths which were not always understood by a Cavalcanti.

But in the 23rd canto of Purgatory Dante encounters his brother-in-law, Forese Donati, among those who had led a life of gluttony, and says, "I do not like to think of the life we two once led in each other's company." We have besides four sonnets, two by Dante and two by Forese Donati, poems of mutual mockery, which, though not containing things which would deserve to be called infamous, nevertheless are written in a rather ignoble tone of rude and vulgar jest, a kind of tap-room poetry, especially those of Dante. The first runs thus :

O Bicci, pretty son of who knows whom,
Unless thy mother, Lady Tessa, tell,—
Thy gullet is already crammed too well,
Yet others' food thou needs must now consume.
Lo! he that wears a purse makes ample room
When thou goest by in any public place,
Saying, "This fellow with the branded face
Is thief apparent from his mother's womb."
And I know one who's fain to keep his bed
Lest thou shouldst filch it, at whose birth he stood
Like Joseph when the world its Christmas saw.
Of Bicci and his brothers it is said
That with the heat of misbegotten blood
Among their wives they are nice brothers-in-law.

Bicci was Forese's nickname. In his answer, Forese taunts him with having forborne to take revenge for the murder of his relative, Geri, son of Bello, and among other things he says :

Right well I know thou'rt Alighieri's son . . .
Thou hast taught us a fair fashion, sooth to say,—
That whoso lays a stick well to thy back
Thy comrade and thy brother he shall be . . .

And again Dante answers:

To hear the unlucky wife of Bicci cough,
(Bicci,—Forese as he's called, you know—)
You'd fancy she had wintered, sure enough,
Where icebergs rear themselves in constant snow;
And, Lord! if in mid-August it is so,
How in the frozen months must she come off?
To wear her socks abed avails not—no,
Nor quilting from Cortona, warm and tough.
Her cough, her cold, and all her other ills,
Do not afflict her through the rheum of age,
But through some want within her nest, poor spouse!
This grief, with other griefs, her mother feels,
Who says, "Without much trouble, I'll engage,
She might have married in Count Guido's house!"
(Rossetti.)

That certainly was not written in a commendable style. Yet he always was sharp and irritable, and in jest as well as in earnest the men of those times were ruder than we care to be to-day. Thus the two men for once may have given a loose rein to their jesting mood without really being in earnest in what they proffered, nor desiring it to be believed. Every man may go too far sometimes—perhaps in a drunken mood—and it does but complete, not abase Dante's portrait if he for once suffered his robe to trail in the mud. We know nothing more about this episode, nor how long it lasted, nor exactly what he did: neither can we determine the date with any degree of certainty.

Another step into the common life of ordinary men was his marriage, which occurred about the year 1295, that is,

about his thirtieth year. His wife was Gemma Donati, the daughter of Manetto, a kinswoman of Corso Donati, of the most powerful baronial family of Florence. Whether this marriage was a love-match, or, as is more probable, a marriage of convention, concluded at the request of his family, or maybe from political motives, is not known to us. At any rate, this marriage into the very first family of Florence proves the high social rank which he either held by birth or had won by his merit. The question whether Dante was happy in his married life or not is a controversy as old as Dantology. Again, there is but one answer to it: we do not know. Boccaccio, who pleases himself in reviling the female sex, and likes to warn men, particularly great men, from marrying, on this occasion, too, discusses largely and loosely what disadvantages spring from marriage for all men, and especially for a poet; how it disturbs him in his work and many things more. At the end he says: "Whether 'all' this was the case in Dante's marriage or not I will not venture to affirm, because I do not know it. Yet it is true that for this reason, or whatever reason else, he once separated never would return where she was, nor did he ever suffer her to come to him, though she had borne him several children." The known untrustworthiness of Boccaccio taken into consideration, it may have been something like this. Dante certainly was not a man who could easily be happy in marriage, nor was he a man with whom it was easy to live, especially if he did not love, and that does not seem to have been the case. He never, in all his writings, mentions his wife, or even so much as alludes to her. She had borne him at least four children. Of his daughter Antonia we know nothing more than that she existed. Of a second daughter it is said in a record that the Brethren of the Blessed Virgin

of "Or San Michele" gave ten gold florins to Giovanni di Boccaccio that he might bring them to sister Beatrice, daughter of the late Dante Alighieri, a nun in the convent of Santo Stefano dell' Uliva in Ravenna." That is all we know about her. One of his sons, Pietro, was a lawyer in Verona, another son, called Jacopo, is reported to have lived in Florence. To both are ascribed commentaries on their father's works. A descendant of Pietro's, Ginevra Alighieri, in the sixteenth century, married a Count Serego; from her the present Counts of Serego-Alighieri are descended.

From the fact that Dante in this time contracted such enormous debts that many years later the family saw itself constrained to sell estates to pay them, it becomes evident that his financial situation was not brilliant, unless, of course, the money was needed and spent for political purposes, for Dante was soon very active in political life. Like every man of good family who after the year 1282 wanted to be in office, he was forced to become a common citizen and enter a guild. He caused himself to be inscribed—we know not why—in the guild of physicians and pharmacists, in the official registers of which his name may still be read. He seems to have soon played an important part. He several times was a member of the Council of the Hundred. He once or twice represented the republic as ambassador;* he became the personal friend of the young King of Naples, who was in Florence about the year 1290; and finally, in the fatal year 1300, was elected Prior, and so became a member of the Govern-

* In the town-hall of the many-towered little town San Gimignano, which to this day is a typical picture of a mediæval Tuscan town, he, in the name of the Florentine Government, moved the annual renewal of the Guelf League.

ment. "This unhappy Priorate," he once said, "was the cause of all my misfortune."

The mutual hatred of the rival parties in Florence, the Whites and the Blacks, had risen to its highest pitch when the notable and fatal year 1300 came. Wherever members of both parties met, insults and quarrels were the consequence. At the burial of a lady of the Frescobaldi family a man's movement, that had been misunderstood, had caused bloodshed. The Donati had been the aggressors. A few days later, Guido Cavalcanti, riding through the streets with a small party of other young men, chanced to meet Corso on the way with his son Simone and others, and in sudden anger spurred his horse directly against him, and people asserted that in riding up to him he threw his lance or his dagger at the Donati. Corso, Simone and Cecchino de' Bardi instantly pursued him with drawn swords and threw stones at him. From the windows, too, stones were thrown, but though wounded in the hand he managed to escape. One should read the vivid and dramatic narrative of Dino Compagni, how the events went on their threatening course, with gossip, hate and rude insults, as they will do in a small excitable town; "more damage was done in Florence by falsely reported words than by the points of the swords." Still the Whites were in power, and the government was in their hands in Florence as well as in Pistoja, but their leaders were slack and irresolute, while their adversaries were ready to do their worst.

In the year 1300, while Dante was one of the Priors, they made an attempt to ensure peace by banishing the most unruly chiefs of both parties. Among the exiled Blacks was Corso Donati, while Dante, with his severe sense of justice, had suffered his friend Cavalcanti to be

confined at Sarzana, where he fell ill from the unhealthy climate and died on his return to Florence two months later.* Everybody said that peace would have been maintained had not Pope Boniface meddled with the affairs of Florence. This remarkable man played such a part in Dante's life and works, and again the events of his life are of such dramatic interest, the time of his pontificate indicates such a signal change in the world's history, that we must pay closer attention to him.

When Nicolas IV. died in the year 1292 there was anarchy in Rome, and in the conclave the cardinals could not agree on their election; months passed in vain, until a sudden word of Cardinal Latino became decisive. On the Morrone, a mountain in Campagna, there lived a hermit called Peter, a peasant's son from the Abruzzi, who belonged to the Franciscans of the Severe Observance, and was said to work miracles. It was truly mediæval that, as soon as Latino pronounced the name, all these false, violent and worldly men, suddenly seized by religious inspiration, chose this man to be Pope! They went out to fetch him in triumph, accompanied by great masses of people. They found him in a little hut with railed windows, a pale man with unkempt beard and hair, emaciated by fasting, his eyes red with weeping, clothed in a hairy sackcloth. They uncovered before him and fell upon their knees; he instantly did the same. On their telling him that he had been elected Pope he ran away, believing they wanted to mock him; but the brethren of his Order seeing in his election a sign of Divine Grace and an event in their favour, persuaded him to accept the

* There he composed the beautiful ballad which begins:

Because I think not ever to return,
Ballad, to Tuscany . . .

office, and on August 24, 1294, he entered Apulia riding on an ass, led by the kings of Hungary and Naples, the people, the barons, the clergy, two hundred thousand men in all flocking together and accompanying him, crying "Hosanna." There was general exultation and great jubilee; the old simple times seemed restored to mankind and a true Vicar of Christ to fill his place. But the old simple times were past. This man, who as Pope called himself Celestine V., was not fit for governing the troubled world. He had no idea what to do, he was unable to refuse any demand that was put to him; he got so shy and bewildered by all the pomp and all the trouble around him that he hid himself in a grotto of the papal palace, "as the wild pheasant hides its head," a biographer of him says.

And now Cardinal Cajetano empowered himself of the weak and bewildered man. He became his adviser and absolute master, making him decree what he, Cajetano, thought good, and governing through him. Finally, with the silent approval of King Charles II. of Naples, he made him sign a decree in which Celestine declared himself incapable and renounced his dignity. On December 24 in the same year, Cajetano, the son of Loffredo, ancestor of the present Dukes Gaetani of Sermoneta, entered Rome as Pope Boniface VIII., riding on a snow-white horse, again led by two kings, followed by a pompous train of barons, knights and warriors, and at the banquet of the coronation he sat alone at his table, all the cardinals and kings after them sitting at another table below him. This was the "high-minded sinner," as a contemporary calls him, a man learned, eloquent, full of dignity, of handsome, regal, commanding appearance, haughty and irascible, with the nature of a despot, not of a priest, and withal

one of the best hated men known in history. His unhappy predecessor, Celestine, fled through Italy, but Boniface ordered him to be pursued. He was taken in Dalmatia and kept a close prisoner in a cell of the papal palace until he died. The manner of his death was uncertain, and many openly hinted at his having been poisoned by order of the new Pope, who, as long as his reign lasted, was attacked by the severe Franciscans with bitterest enmity. His reign was the culminating-point of Church power—the topmost height reached immediately before the fall. The empire lay prostrate. To the elected Emperor, Albert of Hapsburg, who asked for the Pope's confirmation, Boniface replied, "Ego sum imperator." To enhance the splendour of his Court he gave princely rank and the purple to the cardinals. He excommunicated the Colonna and made furious war against them, enriching his own family with their estates. Twice he ordered the town of Palestrina, a fief of the Colonna, to be burned and left in ashes. Sciarra Colonna was made prisoner and sent to the galleys. In his discord with Philip the Fair of France he issued the famous Bull, "Unam sanctam," that begins with the words: "We remind thee that to the Roman priest every human creature is subject."

Philip ordered the Bull to be burned. On December 15 the Pope in Anagni took the expurgatory oath in the presence of the cardinals. He was going to excommunicate and depose Philip on the 18th. But the night before, William of Nogaret, Sciarra Colonna, and other conspirators entered the town with some hundred men under the cry of "Morte al papa! Evviva Francia!" The papal palace was besieged during nine hours; the Pope rejected all conditions; the cathedral took fire, and the palace finally was stormed. The Count of Fundi and Francesco

Gaetano fled, and over the corpse of a bishop the conspirators entered the hall. Boniface sat on his throne, the tiara on his head. A moment they stood awed in silence, then they outraged him. Sciarra Colonna shook him by the arm and threatened him with his drawn sword. But three days and nights the inflexible old man—he was eighty-six—sat on the throne in silence, giving no answer and taking no nourishment, until he was delivered on the fourth day by the Cardinal Fiesco and the people, terrified by sudden remorse. He continued to live for thirty-five days, but he was mad. Whosoever approached him he fancied to be a foe who wanted to take him prisoner. Dante, who was a good hater, and who hated him as the cause of his own misfortune, called him the "great priest." "He bound the Pope to the car of his wrath, and nine times he dragged him through the pit of hell," says Tosti. Nine times Boniface is mentioned in the "Commedia," not in a pleasant way. "Art thou here already, Boniface?" asks his predecessor, Nicolas Orsini, who with burning feet and head downwards stands in his hole when Dante passes. And yet Dante was deeply indignant at that profanation of the highest priestly office even in his enemy's person.

I in Alagna see the *fleur-de-lys*.
  Christ, in His Vicar, captive to the foe.
Him once again as mocked and scorned I see,
  I see once more the vinegar and gall,
And slain between new robbers hangeth He.

He undoubtedly had seen the Pope and had known him personally. He most probably had been in Rome in the year of the jubilee in 1300, and had seen the masses of pilgrims thronging the bridge before the castle of St. Angelo at the time when Boniface saw his power on the

summit. Dino Compagni, Boccaccio and others, tell that he had been Ambassador of Florence at Rome, but many causes make this appear improbable and even impossible. At any rate, he from the beginning most decidedly opposed the Pope, who claimed Tuscany as the property of the See of Rome, as forming part of the inheritance of the Countess Matilda, and made use of every occasion to meddle in Florentine affairs. He had done so repeatedly, and in the year 1300 he again sent the Cardinal Matthew of Acquasparta to Florence to "make peace" among the parties; but, being a haughty and unskilful man, the Cardinal had only succeeded in making matters worse. Among other things, he had asked the republic to send the Pope an auxiliary troop of a hundred men for his wars with the Colonna, and Dante in the Council of the Hundred had given his famous vote of *Nihil fiat.*

The Pope, by secret understanding with the Blacks, sent the French prince, Charles of Valois, as "pacificator" to Florence. He came with the "lance of Judas," Dante says. With a train of unarmed followers he entered Florence on All Souls Day 1301. Some days before the alarmed Priors had sent ambassadors to meet him at Poggibonsi, to whom in a sealed letter he pledged himself not to exercise any sovereign rights in Florence, nor to change any of the laws. But in Florence suspicion and trouble daily increased—and Charles' behaviour was not qualified to quiet it—ever more armed men assembled around him; the Government was at a loss what to do, for their friends kept counsel, but could not decide on any resolute deed. "Their hearts failed," cries Dino, who himself was Prior in those days, and he adds, "Never would I have believed that so great a lord and one of the royal house of France, ever could break his word and

oath." Charles began to claim great sums of money, his armed men occupied the doors of the city, Corso Donati entered it on horseback with numerous friends, and terror began to rule in Florence. In vain the great bell was rung, nobody appeared to obey the call, and the Priors renounced their office. "Many shameful crimes were perpetrated," Dino writes, "on women and maids, houses were plundered, the weak were bereft of their goods, or they hunted them out of the town. Many did whatever they pleased, the accused were forced to confess, and there was no rescue." "A noble city perishes under thee!" a clergyman of Charles' suite said. The prince answered, "Can it be true? I did not know it." Messer Cante de' Gabrielli, from Agubbio, was made podestà, a man who has become immortal because, among many other sentences, by which hundreds of the White were banished and outlawed, he issued the decree against Dante which to this day may be read in the so-called "Libro del Chiodo" in the Archive of Florence. It is written in a most barbarous Latin, and dated from January 27, 1301.* Dante and four others are condemned for peculation, fraud, extortion, bribery, rebellion against the Pope and Charles, breach of peace, and the like; no further details are given; as proof public fame is alleged, and "Having been regularly summoned by a herald and failing to appear, and having been condemned to fines of 5000 gold florins each for contempt of court, they are considered as confessing, and therefore condemned to return all the money unjustly extorted, failing which all their possessions should be confiscated and ruined. Furthermore, they should be banished from

* Readers are not to forget that then the New Year formerly began in Florence and elsewhere on March 25.

Tuscany for the space of two years, and Palmieri degli Altoviti, Dante, Lippo Becchi and Orlanduccio Orlandi inscribed in the public statutes as forgers and defrauders for perpetual memory, and excluded for ever from all civil honours."

On March 10, 1302, the sentence was confirmed and extended to ten other Florentine citizens, and having failed to appear in Court, all the accused in it were declared outlaws and exiles in perpetuity, and if ever one of them should be caught on Florentine soil he should be burned alive.

Most of the chiefs of the White party had left the city at Christmas, Dante probably among them. Of course none had appeared to justify himself, as the consequence would have been immediate death. Not a word is to be said on Dante's guilt. Energetic, resolute, regardless of hate and danger as he was, he probably had incurred the special animosity of the victorious Blacks. Then his self-conscious pride seems to have made many men his enemies. Boccaccio tells that once, when the question arose who had to be appointed ambassador to Rome, Dante was reported to have said: "If I remain, who goes; and if I go, who remains?" And he adds: "This word is said to have had bad consequences for him."

From this time he remained in exile until his death, and until his death was tormented by insatiable longing to return to Florence. As in ancient Rome and in the Greek cities, banishment in the Italian republics was considered worse than death; the exile was a typical apparition in mediæval Italy as in old Grecee. Out of Florence he never could be happy; now in love, now in glowing anger and hatred he expressed his ardent longing to return, in verses "hearing which" Burckhardt says, "the

heart of every Florentine could not but tremble." All his poetry is full of this. First he begged to be allowed to return. One letter begins thus: "Populo mee, quid feci tibi?" ("My people, what have I done thee?") All his despair lies in those few words, which alone remain of the letter.

From all the powers he expected a chance of returning —from a revolution in Florence, from a victory of the banished party, from the princes who were his friends, from the Roman Emperor, and at last from his great poem. There is almost no canto in which he does not speak of his ungrateful country. In the twenty-sixth canto of Hell he addresses her:

Rejoice, O Florence, since so great thy fame,
That over sea and land thy wings are spread,
And through the depths of Hell resounds thy name.

Five such I found among the scoundrel dead,
Thy citizens, whence shame my soul doth fill,
Nor do they with much honour crown thy head.

Still more famous are the verses at the close of the sixth canto of Purgatory, that follow after the grand address to the slave, Italy:

Thou, O my Florence, mayst be well content
With this digression which is nought to thee,
Thanks to thy people, wise in argument.

Many with justice in their hearts we see
Linger, lest unadvised they draw the bow;
Thy people hath it on the tongue's tip free.

Many to bear the common charge are slow;
But thy good anxious people, though none call,
Are heard to cry, "The yoke I'll undergo."

Rejoice thee now, thou hast the wherewithal;
  Rich art thou, thine is peace, and thou art wise!
If true my words, facts will not hide at all.

Athens and Lacedæmon, whence did rise
  The laws of old, on civil order bent,
Took but short step to where life's true good lies.

Compared with thee, so subtly provident
  Of wise reforms, that, half November gone,
Nought lingers that was for October meant.

How often in the time to memory known,
  Hast thou changed laws, coins, polity and right,
And altered all thy members one by one!

And if thou well reflect, and see the light,
  Thou shalt behold thyself as woman sick,
Who on her pillow finds no rest at night,
  And seeks to ease her pain by turning quick.

(PLUMPTRE.)

CHAPTER V

DANTE IN EXILE

It is well known how embittering even a successful political life is, how the few men of pure intention are made to hate and despise mankind by the unavoidable co-operation with others, who are moved by ambition only or desire of profit! One may imagine how much of this Dante must have experienced and how much more in exile, when people no longer had to pay regard to him —from what new and repulsive sides he must have learned to know them.

In the beginning he remained near Florence, in the company of other gentlemen of the White party, who had fraternised with the long-banished Ghibellines, and made several attempts, all unsuccessful, to recover Florence by force of arms. We do not know what part Dante took in those enterprises. He had become a proud, severe, not very amiable man, one who, while feeling the deepest reverence for every man of true worth, yet knew his own worth compared to that of others, and was not inclined to pardon any want of respect towards himself, and probably did not easily forgive those who did not follow his advice. The consequence was that he soon left his fellow exiles in bitter indignation and went his own way. In Paradise he makes his ancestor predict

And that which most upon thy back shall weigh
Will be the mad and evil company
Which in that dreary vale with thee shall stay;
For they ungrateful, impious, base to thee
Shall prove; yet but a little while attend,
And they, not thou, shall blush for infamy.

And of that brute stupidity their end
Shall furnish proof, and well with thee 'twill fare.
Alone, *a party for thyself* to wend
Thy lonely path . . .

With such words of boundless pride he severed the tie that had bound him to the others. Like almost all men of surpassing greatness, Dante stood alone. One generation later all parties strove to claim him as their own.

He went to Verona, where he was twice the guest of the princes of that town; first, before 1304, of Bartolommeo della Scala, and probably afterwards at the Court of Can Grande. To this day, in the town through which the Adige rolls its waters in a wide curve there stand, on the wonderful little Piazza de' Signori, the remnants of the old palace, with its tower and battlements, and a tablet commemorating him who was once here as guest. In the year 1306 he certainly was in Lunigiana with one of the Marquises of Malaspina. It is further certain that for a time he sojourned in Padua, in Bologna, and in Paris. He was probably a student at the universities of these towns, he may even have lectured there himself. But he never attained the rank of a regular professor. And he was probably never well to do, whether he was a teacher or the guest and *protégé* of princes. His ancestor Cacciaguida tells him in Paradise:

How salt that bread doth taste thou then shalt know
That others give thee, and how hard the way
Or up or down another's stairs to go.

In the "Banquet," in the third chapter of the first treatise he says: "Since it pleased the citizens of that fairest and most renowned daughter of Rome—Florence—to expel me from her dear lap, in which I was born and reared until the culmination-point of my life, and in which I desire with all my heart to repose my weary soul in peace with her and to conclude the time that is conceded to me—since that moment I have wandered as a pilgrim and almost as a beggar through almost all the regions where this our language is spoken. And against my will I have displayed the wounds of fate with which people are wont unjustly to reproach the wounded himself. Verily, I have been a vessel without a sail and without a rudder, erring through many ports and bays and shores, chased by the dry wind that blows from painful poverty, I have appeared inconsiderable in the eyes of many men who, perhaps, moved by some rumour, had fancied me to be quite different, and in whose eyes not only my person lost in value but my works also, those which are already completed as well as those which still are to be so.

Dante's external appearance seems to have been by no means imposing. Boccaccio, who had seen him when a child, says of him: "He was small and insignificant-looking, rather stooping, and wore a dark and heavy beard." Nothing is said in those words about Dante's face, nor do they correspond to the well-known expressive countenance. We would fain believe that the portraits which are confirmed and sanctioned by old traditions, and all show the same characteristic lines, are

really Dante's. And though the proofs are not perfectly stringent and incontestable, it is at least highly probable that the portraits are genuine.* If they were not so, if the world had half-unconsciously invented such a form, mythical as it then would be, it would only the more prove the greatness of the man for whose portrait the artistic imagination of mankind has created this almost terrible head. Its expression is of an intensity which Mr. W. H. Dircks, applying to Thoreau, designates simply as "Dantesque," because it cannot be compared to anything but to itself. Two types of the same head are extant: one youthful, soft, full of refinement and yet of a hidden severity, in Giotto's fresco in the chapel of the Bargello in Florence,† the portrait with the rose; then the portraits of the exiled Dante, with the hollow cheeks, the large forehead the energetic hooked chin, and especially the eye

> That, deep and flaming, pierces like a sharp
> Inexorable dagger that obeys
> The ruthless hand.
>
> (VRCHLICKY.)

Both types are essentially the same. One is the Dante of the "Vita Nuova," the other he of the "Divine Comedy." There is the same difference between the two faces that there is between the two works. The hard and stormy experiences of the intervening period explain the differ-

* *Vide* F. X. Kraus in the chapter on "Dante's körperliche Erscheinung, seine Bildnisse" ("Dante, sein Leben und sein Werk, sein Verhältnis zu Kunst und Politik," Berlin: Grote'sche Verlags-Buchhandlung, 1897).

† It was discovered on July 20, 1840, and was marred in the attempt to restore it. The frontispiece reproduces it as it was before the restoration.

ence; the natural development of the man leads from one to the other.

He was proud and self-conscious in his behaviour, yet of the finest manners, but not adapted to society; of an unyielding temper, often abstracted and lost in thought.

Where he had been in all those years, who knows? And what scenes fill his imagination in those endless wanderings, when the visions of the great poem were in his mind! Who is to follow the flight of that powerful and matchless fancy? He never ended his deep and comprehensive studies—a self-taught man, who thought himself a *dilettante*, when his powerful mind, that knew how to make more of a few crumbs than others of the science of a thousand books, had long surpassed all professional scholars and masters of the school.

Between 1308 and 1311 the "Banquet" was written. The "Convivio Amoroso," as it is called in some early editions, is no light book. In the first chapter he explains the title and his intention in writing it. He says that, "though he had not himself been sitting at the blessed table, he yet had sat at the feet of those who are gathered round it, and had collected the crumbs that had fallen from their feast." And because of the sweetness which that little had afforded to him, he had been moved to pity those who had not even that; and "as those who have knowledge always liberally offer of their good plenty to those who are really poor and thus become as a living source by whose water is quenched the natural thirst," so he, too, had desired to arrange a general banquet, and to offer them first the necessary bread. The dishes of the banquet would be served in fourteen courses. He meant to write fourteen treatises commenting on so many canzoni, the allegory of which he intended to be explained in the treatises. By the

"bread" is understood the first treatise, in which he explains why he had written his work in Italian, not in Latin. That he did so once again makes evident his splendid insight, which never shrank from going unusual ways. It was not the fashion then to write learned books otherwise than in Latin, and many men reviled him for doing so and thought but little of his work. Full four hundred years had to pass before in Germany anybody thought of writing a learned book in "Deutsch," which literally means the "people's" language. Only four treatises were completed. The second book treats of the several sciences, the third of philosophy, while in the fourth is expounded a theory of nobility which seems highly remarkable for the time of its origin. The form, of course, is antiquated, but the essence is most modern. He tries to prove, what to us is self-evident, that true nobility has nothing to do with birth, title, descent, or riches, but is based on personal worth alone. "Not the race makes a nobleman, but the man makes a noble race. I know that I speak in opposition to all the world." The scholastic method adopted throughout the book renders it difficult to read, yet it is most interesting, and the beautiful, simple language in which it is written, full of noble harmony, gives it a great charm. Besides, there is that passionate vehemence in it which is always characteristic of Dante. All his fiery temper is found in every sentence; there are no dead passages. One feels how he must have started at his desk in writing the words, "What, you say a horse is noble because it is good in itself, and the same you say of a falcon or of a pearl; and a man should be called noble because his ancestors were so . . . not with words, with knives must one answer such a beastly notion!"

He had more and more become an "intransigeant"; his

terrible love of truth makes him utter words in the perilous fourteenth century which in the nineteenth century would be impossible in almost any country. In "Conv." iv. 6, speaking of the princes of his time, he exclaims, "O you miserable, who are governing the world, O you more miserable, who are governed! beware you, enemies of God, beware of the revolution that approaches you who are holding in your hands the rod of government in Italy! I tell Carlo and you, Federigo, kings, and you other princes and tyrants, take care who are your advisers; mark how often, on every day the real end of human life is shown to you by those your ministers! Better were it for you to fly low like the swallows than like vultures to circle high over the vilest things!"

At the same time he wrote his thoughtful book, "De Vulgari Eloquentia," "of eloquence in the vernacular language." It is the first attempt to write a theory of poetry in Italian, and not a few far-seeing linguistic ideas, which long afterwards were developed by scientific philology, are suggested in it. This work also remained incomplete. Both probably were interrupted by the arrival of the Emperor Henry VII. of Luxemburg in Italy.

The old Guelf had become a Ghibelline, expecting from the Emperor peace and order for Italy and his own return. At this time he probably wrote the book "De Monarchia," in which he defended the idea that the Emperor was the ruler of the world, the same idea for which Charlemagne and the Hohenstaufen had fought, and which was irretrievably lost.

In these books there are beautiful passages and deep thoughts—but no original system of philosophy, as some over-enthusiastic admirers of the poet would have it. His poetical conception of the world was most original,

but in philosophy he was the disciple of others. And he never was a freethinker in a time when many such were to be found. Through all his life Dante was a devout Catholic; in spite of his violent opposition to the temporal government of the Popes and the pernicious riches of the Church, he always felt the deepest reverence for the Church herself as she should have been, and never for a moment doubted the truth of her doctrines. Doubt was perhaps not foreign to him, but certainly not the slightest trace of this is to be found in his works. Whatever Witte and Scartazzini have said against this seems to me far from convincing.* Nowhere can I find anything but devout Catholic faith. I am glad to find this view confirmed by a learned work on Dante's "Geistesgang," the author of which, Dr. Franz Hettinger, is a Catholic clergyman. Beatrice, who in the "Divine Comedy" stands for the light of the Church, reproaches Dante with having been faithless to her. Now Witte and Scartazzini assert that in saying this Beatrice condemns Dante's devotion to philosophy, for which, according to them, he expressed too high an admiration in the "Banquet," valuing it even more than faith. But no trace of such an over-estimation is found in the "Banquet," nor is the slightest approach to religious doubt expressed anywhere. In the fourth chapter of the second book the absolute infallibility of all teachings of the Church is expressly acknowledged.

If Dante ever doubted, I should say that the only thing he may have doubted was God's justice on earth. It even seems probable to me that such doubts in his soul were

* The notion of the "Trilogy" in Dante's works, which Witte was the first to establish, though it be very clever, seems to me a most unhappy idea. I hope to say more on the topic on another occasion.

the source from which sprang his great poem, which is essentially a song of retribution.

Yet I believe that Beatrice's reproaches less concern these doubts than moral aberrations—the aberrations in the forest of life. Dante makes Beatrice reproach him; that is to say, Dante reproaches himself with having turned from the ideals and noble aims of his youth and rushed into the always polluting whirl of the world. We to-day are no longer in a position to tell what he may have exactly meant. In a literal sense it may have been his marriage and other loves, in an allegorical sense many a lower and more worldly aim, that made him swerve from his high path as prophet and poet.

There is one point more to be touched on here. Boccaccio records a great many love affairs of Dante's later life, and other authors have increased the number with a fertile power of invention. When this dull stuff had reached its climax it veered round to the opposite direction, and Scartazzini, for instance, never tires in his prudish endeavour to defend Dante against any taint of this kind, and repeats over and over again what a frigid and dry old scholar Dante was. One is as ridiculous as the other. We are no longer so prudish and severe in judging men, and not so quick in throwing stones at them. That Dante was of a loving and fiery disposition, passionate as few men ever were, is evident in every line he wrote. That, on the other side, his character was severe and pure, that he certainly was no professional hero of French novels, nor a man of brutal sensuality, is likewise evident. But to deny passion to a man, to unman him as it were, while one pretends to justify him, is rather a strange beginning. In this respect we need neither accuse nor justify him—we have suffered enough from all the

superfluous nonsense we have had to hear on the life of Goethe.

It may be sufficient that Dante gave evidence against himself and judged himself severely. For what else could it mean that, through all the penances of Purgatory Dante walks free and unmolested; only through the flames, in which the sins of carnal lust are purged, he has to pass, and stands trembling and hesitating until he is admonished by Virgil that Beatrice stands expectant on the other side. Scartazzini and others affirm that all the canzoni of the so-called second cycle, in which women are praised, have but an allegorical meaning. Suppose they were right in that, I should still say that a man who borrows all his similes from love and in these similes speaks a lover's language with such a fire of life that nobody will believe them to be mere allegories—a man who could write the story of Francesca and Paolo must have known woman and loved well, and must have devoted to them a good part of his life.

Yet we need but glance at the poems themselves. Some are quite cold and full of learned definitions—in short, versified scholastic tracts; in others the allegory is evident; some are of doubtful sense; but then we suddenly are struck by a canzone beginning in the following way:

> Fain in my speech I would be harsh and rough
> As is in all her acts that rock so fair . . .

and then

> My heart doth tremble when I think of her . . .
> For Death is tearing me with Love's sharp teeth,
> Prostrate I lie—bent over me he stands,
> The sword with which Dido was slain in hands,
> In vain I cry for mercy . . .

If only those fair ringlets I could grasp,
Which Love for my undoing crisps with gold,
Ah! how my hand would revel in their hold:
Ah! if I had those tresses in my hand
Which as a rod and scourge to me have grown,
If I could grasp them in the hour of dawn
I should not courteous be or gently gay,
No—like a she-bear in her cruel play!

Whosoever can think that this poem of terrible and tormenting passion is addressed to the fair tresses of philosophy must be a philosopher indeed. It is true that mediæval mystics often borrowed their similes from sensual love, but such passages have quite a different sound, they are clumsier as well as colder. One needs but compare the passages quoted by Perez from the writings of the monks of St. Victor or the sonnet by Jacopone da Todi, "Ciascuno amante che ama il Signore," which, as Bartoli said, is written "as it were, in an erotic trance in the words, the rhythm and the figures of glowing sensuality," and every man of a refined taste will instantly feel how misplaced these unnatural similes of sensual passion in such poems are.

There are some who even believe they enhance Dante's fame by such interpretations; those who always fain would make unclean what God has cleansed. As long as the Creator deems love between man and woman the right way to conserve mankind, those pious souls should be a little more modest in their devotion and not blame His ways with such arrogance.

Then in a sonnet addressed by Dante to Cino da Pistoja, of unknown date, which almost could be called an erotical confession Dante says:

I have with Love in contact close been thrown,
From the ninth year the sun did mark for me,
And know how he now curb, now spur may be,
And how beneath him men may smile and groan.
Who strives with him, with skill and strength alone,
Acts as he does who, when the storm plays free,
Rings out a peal, as though the vaporous sea
And thunderous strife that music could atone.
Wherefor within the range of that his bow
Free choice to act hath not its freedom true,
So that our counsels vain dart to and fro.
Well with new spur in flank may he us prick,
And each new pleasure he before us lays,
We must needs follow, of the old joy sick.

(PLUMPTRE.)

That is all we know. In the "Divine Comedy" a few words are spoken of a very young girl called Gentucca, who was to please him so well, that for her sake he was even to like Lucca, her native town, which he had before hated, but that may have been only a fatherly admiration of an old friend—we know nothing about it. But these poems, as all his poetry, give us insight into Dante's nature, which was severe as well as passionate.

Among the allegorical canzoni, some of which are composed in a cold and severe style, marble-like, and full of striking similes, there is one addressed to Florence, another of doubtful sense, which, perhaps, equally turns on love and likewise concludes with verses to Florence, the never-forgotten city hated and loved alike:

Dear mountain song of mine, thou goest thy way,
Perchance thou'lt Florence see, mine own dear land,
That drives me, doomed and banned,
Showing no pity, and devoid of love.
If thou dost enter there, pass on, and say,
"My lord, no more against you can wage war,

There whence I come, his chains so heavy are,
That, though thy fierce wrath placable should prove,
No longer freedom hath he thence to move."

(PLUMPTRE.)

Meanwhile, a time of new hopes dawned on him. In the year 1310 Henry of Luxemburg came to Italy. By no one was he saluted with such exultation as by Dante. He wrote letters full of wild and triumphant joy to Rome and Florence and to all princes of Italy. He had an audience with the Emperor; in his letters he called him the "New Moses" and "The Lamb of God"; he was full of the most ardent hopes—but the enterprise failed and the Emperor died at Buonconvento on August 24, 1312. In the year 1315 he was buried in the Campo Santo at Pisa; at the feet of the sarcophagus is an eagle holding a scroll in its claws, on which are written the words: "Quidquid fecimus venit ex alto."* "He lies as one in a troubled sleep," Ampère said of this monument. What Dante felt at this blow he never expressed. Now all was over, all hope gone for ever. The Florentines renewed the sentence in the year 1312 and again in the autumn of 1315, including his sons in the condemnation. Anybody by the new sentence was allowed to do with their person and property whatever he liked; if they ever should be taken on Florentine ground, they should be led to the scaffold and be beheaded. Again he wandered a banished fugitive on unknown ways, until he found his last refuge in Ravenna.

He probably had become old before his time, a broken man wholly retired within himself. That is the picture which is before one's eyes when one thinks of Dante.

* "Whatever we did came from above." Kraus thinks this inscription strong and stern enough to have been composed by Dante.

Not the youthful portrait with the rose, but the stooping man with the haggard features, the deep and terrible eyes, in whose face we see exile and care and sorrow and unfathomable mystic thought, that is the Dante we know, the exiled one—"Dantes Alagherii Florentinus exul immeritus," as he always styles himself in his letters—"Dante the son of Alighiero, a Florentine, exiled though guiltless," that is the Dante who wrote the "Divine Comedy."

How long the plan may have slumbered and ripened within him, at what time the first cantos were conceived, and when the last were completed, is all unknown to us. The contents give scant evidence as to the date of their origin, because, undoubtedly, all was repeatedly corrected and changed and gone through over and over again. The last cantos were not found until some time after his death. Still, in his last years Dante, conscious of the greatness of his work, hoped that for its sake he would one day be recalled to Florence. The twenty-fifth canto of Paradise begins with these verses:

Should it e'er chance that this my sacred song,
To which both Heaven and earth have thus set hand
And which had made me lean through years full long,

O'ercome the cruelty that keeps me banned
From the fair fold where I as lamb did rest,
Foe of the wolves, who war against the land,

With other voice, in other fleece then drest,
I shall return as poet, laurel-crowned,
And at my baptism's font my brow invest.

(PLUMPTRE.)

Dante could never suffer himself to accept the poet's crown—proud as ever—for who was there to judge him?

He pronounced himself worthy of the crown, and wanted to put the laurel on his head himself after his return in his "beautiful San Giovanni." It was not to be. As Michael Angelo sang :

Heaven opened wide its doors to him
While his dear city drove him from her own.

CHAPTER VI

THE "DIVINE COMEDY"

Boccaccio records the legend that at Dante's death the thirteen last cantos of the "Divina Commedia" were missing, and notwithstanding the most minute research could not be found. Some months had passed, when one night the poet appeared to his son Jacopo in a dream, and revealed to him the place where the manuscript was hidden.

That a resurrection of a dead man was necessary to preserve the work that tells of the dead seems almost natural; one cannot marvel so much at it. The poem itself is still more marvellous. What a spirit dwelt in the man who dared, as it were, to pass judgment on the world, to pronounce God's sentence on His creatures! He did so in terrible emotion, and fully persuaded of his mission. The trembling agitation with which he wrote is felt in every line of the poem. From what a "Patmos of Thought" was this book written—that seems like a message from the world beyond, the reminiscences of a soul which had once already left its "tenement of clay."

We can but distantly surmise what the man must have suffered who was driven to such a work! In vain had he entered the world and tried to obtain a place in it; repulsed and misunderstood, wandering through it, an erring outcast fugitive, at last he turned from it, and

from a far distant height, his soaring soul dared to pass judgment upon it. One of the loneliest men who ever lived! For him and his like the word has been spoken which the apostle heard: "My grace is sufficient for thee!"

The man who wrote the "Divine Comedy" was a tragic, not an unhappy man. For whosoever has experienced the deep joys which an artist feels in creating may conceive what hours of boundless pride, what concentrated sensations of deep happiness such a work must have afforded him. He knew quite well who he was, and what a task had been allotted to him. No poet ever felt so proudly, and at the same time so modestly, the surprising magnitude of his work. That none of his contemporaries was aware of his greatness could not for a moment make him falter. He undoubtedly alluded to himself in that passage in the eleventh canto of Purgatory where, speaking of the poets of his time, he says:

> One Guido did the other's fame abase,
> And yet perhaps that man's already born
> Who both from their high-seated nest will chase!

In Hell, Ser Brunetto prophesies:

> . . . If thou follow but thy star
> Thou canst not fail to reach a glorious shore
> If right I saw in life, that seems so far . . .
> Fortune such honours has prepared for thee.
> That both the parties will thine aid desire,
> But let the goats far from the sweet grass be!

In Paradise he is saluted as a chosen one by the blessed spirits.

> O thou thrice blessed one who to the throne
> Of the eternal triumph hast been called,
> Before thy mortal vessel be destroyed!

Nevertheless the first, whom he judged and found wanting, was himself. He saw what he had been, and what had become of him, how he had found the right path, made his peace with God, and recognised that all had been right and necessary.

Many hidden meanings are expressed in the grand epic. Its many-sided symbolism allows of many interpretations. First it tells, legend-like, that the man Dante has been in Hell and in Heaven, and has seen much that is hidden from the eyes of mankind. This is the first and most literal sense of it. The second step is remoter, but is not yet quite an allegory; it is Dante's confession of his own salvation, and how it was brought about. Further meanings are indicated in the first chapter of this part; but, above all, it means that Dante was saved out of the wilderness of doubt, into which his own unhappy fate and the frightful state of the world had plunged him. He had suffered all ill chance that could fall to the lot of man. He loved and had lost his beloved one; his family life was unhappy; he was a statesman, and as such was unsuccessful; he saw his party defeated and driven from the land, and when the Emperor, from whom he had expected the redemption of Italy and his own reinstatement, entered Italy with a victorious army, he saw him die. He had been full of the noblest intentions, yet men not only gave him no thanks, but had hunted him out, had branded his name with foul crimes and condemned him to death. He had lost his whole fortune; one of the proudest of men, he was forced continually to humble himself and to live on foreign alms; one of the greatest poets of all times, he saw himself neither understood nor honoured. His whole life was devoted to his native city, he clung to it with all his heart, and he passed twenty-two years longing

in vain to return to it. A devout Catholic, full of reverence for his Church, he saw it degraded, governed by "New Pharisees," and at last fallen and dishonoured. Italy, whose unity was dear to him, he saw torn by the hatred of parties and cruelly devastated by war. A sea of wrong had passed over him, he saw a sea of wrong raging over the world in which he lived; wherever he turned his eyes everything was such as to drive him to despair, but he despaired not. He believed, and in spite of all, recognised the high harmony of the world. He had found the path for his soul, the work for his mind, by which he got rid of the weight which crushed him, and at the same time took his proud revenge on the men who had so maltreated him. In "eternal letters of fire" he wrote his terrible judgment "as lightning writes its cipher on the rocks" to be read by all posterity, that men might one day fix the balance between this one man on the one side and mankind on the other.

To attain this he had to do in a spiritual sense what the Greek mathematician had demanded: he, as it were, overleaped the boundaries of life and found a standpoint beyond it. Imperfect, full of wrong, incomprehensible as this world must needs seem in itself, he was forced to search for its justification in the world invisible; he was forced to follow all the lines, that appear in this our world only in broken strands, to their perfection in the other; what is but an incomplete fragment of an arch here, darting from none knows where to none knows whither, will close to a perfect circle in the spiritual world that became visible to that grand seer. His eye pierced through the boundaries of time and space into the surrounding sphere of eternity: the wrongs done here were repaired and punished there.

To see this it had become necessary, or, as he explains

it, the heavenly powers by mediation of loving and friendly spirits had so decreed it that his soul should be shown the way through the metaphysical realms, where he could see the terrible retribution of God's justice and be satisfied. The state of horrible crime on earth was not all—the last word was not spoken here—he could be calmer and endure all, knowing what was to follow. He had seen eternal justice and the end of life face to face, and while his soul was still trembling from the sight of those sombre glories, he sat down to tell of it.

All the secret sense, mystic connections and hidden allusions of the work, in which he gave utterance to his high insight will probably never be fully known. Already at the time when Beatrice had been lost to him, and his thoughts followed her into the other world, his mind was deeply and intensely occupied with the Invisible and his imagination attracted by its glories and hidden terrors. Even then he spoke of wonderful visions and strange intuitions. What the reason was, that later, when he came to tell of the great vision, he chose the year 1300 as the date of his illumination, is unknown. The year, perhaps, was an important one to him from reasons which he alone knew, relating to changes within him—reasons which could only be investigated by reading in the soul of the man; perhaps the fact that it was the year of the jubilee of Christ's birth was decisive. So much is certain; he began his mystic pilgrimage on Maundy Thursday 1300, and ended it in the week of the Resurrection of Christ.* Into these eight days was concentrated the whole essence of his life.

* My esteemed friend, Lieutenant-Colonel Pochhammer, has alleged good reasons for believing that Dante meant the date of his descent to be Saturday, March 25, 1301. However, the question seems by no means decided, and I still prefer the interpretation above given.

What title he originally chose for his work is unknown. If the letter to Can Grande of Verona, in which the Paradise is dedicated to that prince, be genuine, he called it the "Comedy," or rather a "Comedy." In those times every poem which ended happily was called a comedy, as he says in the letter itself. In one or two, and not very early, editions, it is called the "Vision of Dante Alighieri"; in a few, simply "Le terze rime di Dante." Afterwards the attribute of "Divino," which Italians like to confer on their great artists, was given to the poet, and in the sixteenth century the work itself was called "Divine." That was the natural origin of this title, which since has become the universal one, and nowadays is mostly believed to have another and mystic sense, corresponding to the contents of the work.

There exists no poetical work elaborated with such consummate art as this. The smallest detail is worked out; it resembles a technical work, every iron-joint, every nail of which has been considered before. Even the number of the words seems to have been counted. The mystical properties of numbers on which such stress is laid already in the "Vita Nuova," where the number Nine—that of the miraculous—recurs ever and again, and Beatrice herself is called a Nine, that is, a wonder whose root is the Trinity—these properties are worked out to the utmost in the structure of the "Divine Comedy." The numbers Three—that of the threefold Deity; Nine—that of wonder and second birth; and Ten—the number of the Perfect, are the basis of its construction. Three are the rhymes, three verses form a stanza, three animals arise to terrify Dante, three holy women intervene for him, three guides lead him. Three in number are the realms, and correspondingly the whole poem is divided into three parts;

the book opens with an introductory canto, then follow ninety-nine cantos, thirty-three for each of the three realms, corresponding to the years of Christ's life on earth, so that the number of all the cantos is a hundred, the number of the Whole. Each of the three realms is divided into ten regions, Hell into Limbo and the nine circles; Purgatory into three preparatory divisions and the seven circles of the capital sins; in Paradise there are nine heavens and as tenth region the Heaven of perfect light, the Empyrean. Even verses and words seem to have been counted, for the number of the words is 99,542; and of verses Hell contains 4720, Purgatory 35 more, and Paradise again three more. And each of the three parts ends with the word "stars."

To procure a fit scene for his poem, Dante, as it were, created the world anew in his fancy. In the centre of the ten heavens the round ball of the earth is floating. Its northern hemisphere bears the continent, in the very midst of it is Jerusalem, in its interior is placed the funnel of hell. In its deepest depths, in the earth's centre, the point of concentrated gravitation and cold, where all warmth and all light end, at the farthest distance from God and His heavens, is the dwelling of Satan, who is confined there in eternity. The opposite southern hemisphere is that of the wide waters; from a solitary island rises a mountain of immense height on whose summit, near to the zone of fire and the moon, the terrestrial paradise, the Garden of Eden, is situated.

Somewhere on the earth's surface, half dreaming, the poet has left it and on unknown paths has entered the realm beneath it. That is the well-known grand opening:

"In the midst of our life's path I found myself in a dark forest, and the right path was lost, so dark and terrible

was that forest, that even in thinking of it its terror seems to return! Death cannot be more bitterly felt!" And yet so good has been its result that he must tell all that happened there! He no longer knows how he entered it, so full of slumber was his soul when he lost his first path; yet he knows this much, that at the end of that Vale of Tears he reached a hill on whose summit the planet's rays already fell, which is the sure leading star of mankind. The planet was the Sun, the Light of God. He begins to feel some relief,

> And gazes back upon the scene behind,
> Which never living man had yet passed o'er!

But just as he begins to ascend that sloping hill he sees with terror a leopard supple, lithe and fleet, with dusky-spotted skin, barring his way; yet it being springtime and the hour of morning, he hopes that the beast will withdraw, when lo! a lion appears, with upraised head and fierce hunger, and a she-wolf, that in her very leanness seems laden with every filthy greed. Trembling he stands, and slowly, slowly turns back towards the depth, where "the sun is silent."

Thus recoiling in the deepest despair, a form suddenly rises before him that seems dumb with the silence of centuries. "Have pity on me, whosoever thou art, man or shade!" Dante cries. It is Virgil, who makes himself known and asks: "How is it that thou turnest back to such bitterness? Why dost thou not ascend the Delectable Mountain, which is the cause and beginning of all joy?" "O art thou then Virgil!" Dante begins, his forehead reddened with shame; "O thou my master! source of all honour, which I drew from that style I took from thee! My guide! by all the love I ever applied to thy great

work, thou seest the beast that threatens my way; save me from it, renowned sage!" "Another way must be thine," Virgil replies; "on the paths of this world there is no rescue from that dire she-wolf of greed which primordial envy once let loose from hell to ruin mankind, which weds with many other beasts, and will continue to do so until the Greyhound come, who will be her death, and who will save that poor and suffering Italy!"

Virgil was thought to be the greatest of all wizards and sages of antiquity. The fourth Eclogue, which, indeed, sounds like a prophecy of Christ's birth, had procured him such fame. He continues:

"Wherefore for thee I think and judge 'tis well
That thou should'st follow, I thy leader be,
And guide thee hence to that eternal cell,

Where thou shalt hear sharp wails of misery,
Shalt see the ancient spirits in their pain,
For which, as being the second death, men cry:

Those thou shalt see who, in the hope to gain,
When the hour comes, the blessed ones' happier clime;
Can bear the torturing fire nor yet complain.

To these would'st thou with eager footsteps climb,
A soul shall guide thee worthier far than I:
With her I'll leave thee when to part 'tis time.

For that great Emperor who reigns on high,
Because I lived a rebel to His will,
Wills that through me none come His city nigh.

Through all the world He rules, yet there reigns still
There is His city, there His lofty throne.
Thrice blessed whom He doth choose those courts to fill!"

Then spake I, "By the God thou didst not own,
O Poet, I of thee a boon desire,
That I may 'scape this woe, or worse unknown,

That whither thou hast said thou lead me higher,
So that St. Peter's gate in sight I find,
And those thou tell'st of in their torments dire."
Then he moved onward and I trod behind.
(PLUMPTRE.)

The second canto begins with that beautiful passage: The day was closing and the dusky air softly began to free all beings from their cares. I alone prepared to sustain the toil of the way and of pity, which my unerring mind will now retell." Doubts were filling his mind: what does Virgil—that is, he himself—expect from him? How can he trust him? At whose side is he going to place himself? Aeneas, of course, destined to found Imperial Rome, could dare it; the other who, living, ever saw the other world was the "chosen vessel," the Apostle Paul, for in the Second Epistle to the Corinthians is written:

"It is not expedient for me doubtless to glory. I will come to the visions and revelations of the Lord.

"I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago (whether in the body I cannot tell, or whether out of the body I cannot tell; God knoweth), such an one caught up to the third heaven.

"And I knew such a man . . . how that he was caught up into paradise and heard unspeakable words which it is not lawful for a man to utter. . . .

"For though I would desire to glory I shall not be a fool, for I will say the truth. . . .

"And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh. . . ."

At the Apostle's side Dante had dared to place himself as the third elected and he now hesitates: "I am not Aeneas, nor Paul. Who am I that I should try such a

thing? Who concedes it?" He is full of misgivings as to his strength. But Virgil warns him to beware of cowardice, and then explains to him how he came to be there. He had been sitting in the society of heroes and poets of antiquity when suddenly a lady called him, blessed and fair, softly and sweetly speaking with angelic voice, who said: "My friend, no friend of fortune's, is so entangled in the perilous net of life, that he will be lost if thou with thy well-graced words do not rescue him." The Virgin herself and St. Lucia had asked her why she did not help him, who once had loved her so much that

> For her sake he left the common herd.
> "I am Beatrice," she says, "who bid thee go,
> Love moved me, and from Love my speech did flow.
> Why dost thou falter then? why hesitate
> While three such ladies, blessed by God's dear grace,
> There are in Heaven, caring for thy fate?"

Much has been written by way of explaining the symbolism of these two first cantos.* There can be but little doubt that it indicates how Dante in the dark forest of life was threatened and hindered by the three chief vices —luxury, pride and avarice—and how the gracious Queen of Heaven herself, aided by the saint who seems to have been the patroness of Dante and by Beatrice, sends out Virgil—that is, the old wisdom of this earth—to save him. Yet all these symbols possibly may have more meanings than one. What he certainly—and whatever sense may be hidden in the different figures—wishes to imply, is that the heavenly powers made an attempt to save him by according him those special revelations which he

* *Vide* Kraus, "Dante," p. 441 *sqq.*, "Die Allegorie der zivei ersten Gesänge des Inferno." Paul Pochhammer, "Die Gottl. C medie," Leipzig, 1901. Einführung.

proceeds to describe, that great illuminating vision of the "mystery of creation." What is most discussed of all are the prophecies of Virgil, the question who may be the greyhound by whom the she-wolf will be vanquished and Italy be delivered. Some say that Can Grande is meant by it, or Henry of Luxemburg and others; some are even of the opinion that Dante alludes to the world's Saviour Himself. The question does not promise ever to be solved. Nor do I think it a matter of great importance to us.

They go and approach the dark portal with the well-known inscription:

Through me men pass to city of great woe;
Through me men pass to endless misery;
Through me men pass where all the lost ones go.

Justice it was that moved my Maker high,
The Power of God it was that fashioned me,
Wisdom supreme and primal Charity.

Before me nothing was of things that be,
Save the Eterne, and I eterne endure:
Ye that pass in, all hope abandon ye.

On entering through it:

There sighs and tears and groans disconsolate
So sounded through the starless firmament,
That at the outset I wept sore thereat.

Speech many-tongued and cries of dire lament,
Words full of wrath and accents of despair,
Deep voices hoarse and hands where woe found vent,—

These made a tumult whirling through the air,
For evermore in timeless gloom the same,
As whirls the sand storm-driven here and there.

Dante asks who these are, and the answer betrays a

conception of surpassing grandeur. For that is not yet hell! but these are the sorrowful souls of those "who lived without glory and without shame." The indifferent, the worthless, the inert, who had lived in sordid quiet and devoid of aspirations. Heaven expels them and hell refuses them. "They have no hope, even in death," for that is passed, and their blind life is so base that they envy any other lot.

Nothing remains to tell that they ever lived. Justice and Mercy alike scorn them—"better not speak of them but pass in silence," Virgil says. If you keep in mind that we are not only in hell, but that every scene symbolises a certain state of soul, that every circle is to show the living, where they are and what is their state in reality, the obvious sense of the verses will appear to be "worse than all sin is narrow indifference." These are the miserable "che mai non fur vivi," "who have never lived at all,"

Hated by God and by God's enemies.

They arrive at the shore of Acheron, where lamenting and trembling souls are transported by Charon to the other shore. Charon thrusts back the living man, who, in a way that is not quite clear to him, suddenly finds himself in the first circle of hell, where the heroes and sages of antiquity and pagan lands dwell in peaceful and happy meadows. Not having been Christians, Paradise is closed to them. Here are the patriarchs, with the exception of those who, like Adam, Moses, David, after Christ's descent to hell, were raised to heaven. Here are Homer, Saladin and others, and with proud modesty Dante records with what courtesy Homer, Horace and other poets received him. "I was the sixth among five such men."

In the second circle they find those who sinned from love, hurled to and fro by eternal whirlwinds—the symbol of restless passion. That is the canto which contains the famous episode of Francesca da Rimini, "a thing," as Carlyle says, "woven as out of rainbows on a ground of eternal black." No translation will ever be made to render all the charm of these most touching lines, placed like an island in that ocean of gloom and darkness, yet themselves burning with a sombre glow, as a night lightened by the flaring eruption of a volcano; the song of saddest, tenderest love and most intense pain. Thousands he saw passing him who all had been undone by love: Paris, Tristan, all the knights and fair ladies. Deepest pity filled the man's soul, who himself had known love so well, and he stands with troubled mind. Then he expresses the desire to speak to two, who fly together, and seem to be carried so lightly on the air. He conjures the "pained souls" by the love "that once united and undid them" to come to him. And they come, like doves descending on open wings through the serene sky, so powerful was his loving call, "O gracious, O kind being that descendest through this dark and pernicious region to visit us, whose blood dyed the earth,"

> If he were kind to us who rules the world
> We would pray unto Him to grant thee peace,
> Because thou pitiest our misery.

Peace seems sweetest and most desirable to those restless souls. And Francesca tells her story with that triple invocation of love. "Love, which so quickly befalls a noble heart, enamoured him of my fair body; Love, which never spares loving to the beloved, enamoured me of him with such power, that even here in hell he leaves me not; Love

led us to one common death! It was Love which did all." And Dante bows his head in deepest thought, until the poet asks him, "What art thou thinking of?" And he answers: "Alas, how many fond thoughts, what deep desire led those two to the unhappy pass!" and turning to the spirit says, "Francesca, thy suffering makes me so sad, so full of pity, that I could well weep with thee; but, tell me, in the time of the sweet sighs, how did Love grant that thou too shouldest come to know the doubtful pangs?" And she, "There is no greater grief than to remember past joys in misery; but if thou wishest so strongly to hear what the first root of our love was, I will tell thee, though I must speak with tears. We once sat and read, for pleasure's sake, of Lancelot and how Love held him fast—we were alone and had no misgivings . . . yet oftentimes our eyes stopped reading and met, our faces grew pale, but there was one passage that undid us;—when we read how that sweet smiling mouth was kissed by such a lover, then he, who never may be separated from me, all trembling, kissed my mouth . . . our Gallehault was the book, and he who wrote it . . . on that day we did not read one line more!" And while one of the spirits thus speaks, the other weeps so pitifully that Dante, pale and broken by compassion, faints and falls, like a dead man.

In the third circle the sins of gluttony are punished. Souls lie in foul mud and mire under an "accursed eternal cold and heavy rain" of dark water, snow and hail. Here a Florentine sinner, Ciacco, predicts to Dante his imminent exile. In the next canto prodigals and misers (among the latter many churchmen), with the wild cries and howls of beasts, roll huge stones against each other. Most remarkable is the symbolism in this passage; with these souls alone in all hell no exchange of words is

possible. They have no sense left for anything; there is no speaking to men who live for money alone, their spirit is dead to all aspiration! Over the Stygian pool he is rowed in the bark of the horse-maned Phlegyas to the burning town of Dis. The souls of those who once wasted their lives with grumbling, moroseness, and needless ire arise from out of the slimy pool, clutch the boat with their hands and teeth, tear each other, and again sink into the waters. A mighty wall of red-hot iron, occupied by thousands of devils, encloses the deep interior funnel of hell. By it a sharp philosophic distinction is indicated. Until now Dante had but seen the sinners who had failed by insufficient will to do right, whose force of resistance against temptation had not been strong enough. Now follow those who were active in evil and intentionally bad. The first are the heretics, silently lying in countless burning coffins. Here is Frederick II., here the elder Cavalcanti, and Farinata degli Uberti. Notwithstanding his mediæval opinions, Dante here again proves that the beginnings of more modern ideas were dawning in him. Whereas his theory forces him to condemn, yet he is unable to exult in the damnation of souls, who, in spite of their crimes, appear noble and great to him. Just as he cannot conceal his pity for Francesca and Paolo, so he bows his head with deep reverence in the presence of the high-minded Farinata and again on the glowing sand to his master, Ser Brunetto, nay, Virgil himself admonishes him to be courteous to three other great Florentines, doomed and damned though they be.

Passing on through ever new torments and new classes of sinners, they descend deeper and deeper. The vivid distinctness with which the landscape, the scenes, all



Brogi photo.

DANTE

FROM A PLASTER CAST

Uffizi Gallery, Florence

movements are painted is admirable beyond expression. By the movement of his throat while drawing breath, by the stones that give way under his foot, the spirits notice with terror that a living man is passing, while in the lighter regions they perceive it by the shadow which his body throws in the sun. But here below there is no sun, but all is darkness, or fire and terror. There is the Hell of Serpents, Hell full of lacerated and bleeding bodies and limbs, others full of all disgusting, stinking sickness, a wild phantasmagoria of torments. In one of the "Evil Pits" where the dishonest officers are drowned in seething pitch, and raise their heads out of it to cool them, "as frogs will thrust out their muzzles in a watery ditch," there follow scenes of grotesque and wild hellish frolic in which devils watch and catch one of the sinners and fight for the prize of tearing him.

Ever deeper he descends until he reaches the place where the ghosts of traitors are imprisoned in eternal ice; walking over the glassy surface he describes his own horror at seeing the livid frozen bodies in the green transparent ice beneath him. Suddenly he comes upon two spirits imprisoned in one pit, one bent over the other, gnawing and biting the latter's skull. On Dante's asking who he is, the sinner, wiping his mouth on the other's hair, uplifts himself from the horrible repast and says: "I know not who thou art, yet to hear thee, know I that thou wast born in Florence; learn, then, that I was Count Ugolino"—and then he tells the world-famous story, with all the terrifying art which Dante is master of, the abrupt and vivid painting, condensing all sweetness and all horrors into one short sentence. The dream before dawn that frightened the father: how he saw wolf and wolf-cubs chased by lean hounds, bearing the faces of his Pisan

enemies, and, waking, heard the children crying in their sleep for bread; how he heard the guards locking the tower's door, and suddenly struck by the fearful meaning of that noise, stared speechlessly into his children's faces. Little Anselm cried: "Why dost thou look at me so, father?" He answered not, he shed no tear, hour on hour passed by, day and night; with the new morning a small ray of light fell into the gloomy cell, and he saw the horror in his own pale face reflected in that of the four boys, and in despair he bit his own arm; and the boys deeming it to be hunger, not wrath, cried: "Eat mine, father, our flesh is poor enough, but it is thine own!" Then he calmed himself to quiet them, and again day by day passed, and on the fourth one of the boys dying cried out: "Why dost thou not help me, father?" On the fifth day he alone was living, blind, stumbling over them; then, what grief had not done hunger did—the last sentence darkly implies what so often has been told. He had not yet quite finished his story when his teeth, like fangs, were again tearing the Archbishop's skull by whose order that horror had been perpetrated, and the bare bones are heard cracking as if a dog were satiating himself.

But Dante, who on this occasion breaks out into wild imprecations against Pisa, the blot of shame,

Del bel paese dove il si suona,

immediately after shows himself as the vengeful and ruthlessly passionate Italian he was; of a no less mediæval mind than those whose vengeance had been wreaked with such atrocity. Already before this scene he had by chance struck the head of one of the sinners with his foot, and on the spirits' angry remonstrance asked for his name; but the sinner wants it to remain

hidden, and requests him to take himself hence nor vex his soul. Upon that Dante angrily clutches him by his "hinder scalp" and threatens not to leave one single hair upon his skull unless he confess his name. The sinner again sullenly refuses, and more than one good handful has Dante torn out, when another spirit strikes in, calling the first by name. What a truly hellish scene in that den of ice and woe! The faces of the tormented are covered by a crust of frozen tears, and one of them begs the passing Dante to free his eyes from it. Dante promises to do so if he answers his questions, adding the doubtful oath, "May I go down still deeper if I fail to do so." Upon that the spirit confesses himself to be Fra Alberigo of Faenza, and the soul freezing at his side that of the Genoese Branca d'Oria. "I trow," Dante replies, "that thou deceivest me here; Branca d'Oria is yet alive on earth." But the other explains that his body may still exist on earth possessed by an evil spirit, but the soul certainly is here below! "And now open my eyes." "And I," says Dante, "I opened them not—it was virtuous to cheat such a beast." How that paints the man who so well knew how to hate, and how truly devilish to say of a man alive that his soul had left him long ago, and that a fiend was living in his body, in a time when such things were believed.

Ever deeper, darker and narrower the pit becomes, until, like an immense black cloud, the three-headed body of Lucifer arises before them. Holding on by his shaggy hide they descend through the rocks around his middle, when Virgil suddenly, with toil and labouring breath, turns round and seems to climb back to hell; and Dante following, sees high above him Lucifer's legs and feet. They have passed the centre of the earth, and find them-

selves in a large cave, through which they wander, until by an opening above them they once more see the stars of heaven.

Pochhammer somewhere calls the "Divine Comedy" a triptych, the central picture of which is the most perfect. Carlyle was of the same opinion, as well as Alfred von Berger in a recent essay on Dante. S. Heller admired the Paradise more than the rest. But most men are attracted and deeply impressed by the ever-changing horrors and the grotesque and monstrous scenes of hell, and find the two other parts comparatively monotonous. Passion, revenge and sin certainly allow of more life and dramatic movement than penitence and religious ecstasy. The Inferno is surely more easily understood than the two other parts.

"A sweet lustre of oriental sapphire" greets the wanderers, coming from hell, when they once more behold the sky. The morning breeze and the victorious dawn of day clear the mist, and as a trembling light Dante sees the wide ocean of the southern hemisphere sparkling before him. In the midst of the island on which they stand the mountain arises. More rapidly than ever bird flew a light darts across the sea. It is the radiant wings of the angel who is guiding a ship full of souls to the shore. Among them Dante recognises a friend of his youth, the singer Casella, and upon Dante inviting him to sing, Casella intones Dante's own *canzone*, "Amor che nella mente mi ragiona!"

At the foot of the mountain are resting and wandering those who in life have failed to turn to God, or postponed it until the last moment. Here Dante meets King Manfred and many others, and just on his taking leave of a

group of souls a woman addresses him with the words: "O think of me, I am La Pia"—Pia de' Tolomei of Siena whom her jealous husband had ordered to be thrown out of a window of his castle in the Maremma. The sixth canto contains his memorable meeting with the troubadour Sordello and the famous outcry of Dante on the doleful state of Italy:

> Ah, slave Italia, home of sad despair,
> Ship without pilot, where the storm blows shrill,
> No Queen of Kingdoms, but a harlot's lair.

They enter Purgatory by a narrow gate, over the mystic steps which symbolise the sacrament of penitence. The angel who is warder of the gate writes seven P's (*peccatum*, sin) on Dante's forehead with the point of his sword. On the seven cornices, which run round the mountain sides, the seven deadly sins of Pride, Envy, Anger, Sloth, Avarice, Gluttony and Lasciviousness are purged; and in every one they encounter swarms of souls who joyfully bear the torments of their penitence, full of the hope once to reach the blessed state.

> Our Father, Thou who dwellest in the Heaven,
> Not bound by space, but by love more intense,
> Which Thou unto Thy primal works hast given,
>
> Praised be Thy name and Thine omnipotence
> By every creature, as 'tis meet and right
> To render thanks to thy sweet effluence.
>
> Upon us may Thy kingdom's peace alight,
> To which we cannot of ourselves arise,
> Unless it come with all our reason's might,
>
> As of their will Thine angels sacrifice
> Make to Thee, while their lips "Hosanna" say,
> So may men offer all their will's device!

Our daily manna give to us to-day,
  Without which whoso through this desert drear
Journeys, goes back, though pressing on his way :

And as the trespass we from others bear
  We forgive each, so, Lord, do Thou forgive
Of bounty, nor to count our merit's care.

Our virtue, which so soon doth harm receive,
  Put not to peril with our ancient foe,
But from his evil sting deliverance give.

This final prayer, dear Lord, from us doth flow,
  Not for ourselves, for we no longer need,
But for their sakes whom we have left below.

So praying for themselves and us "God speed!"
  Those souls went on their way beneath their weight,
As oft in dreams such evil fancies breed ;

Round still and round, in anguish disparate,
  Are wearied all, along the bank they wound,
While I, all bent, with them my way did take.

(PLUMPTRE.)

In this circle Dante feels he, too, will once have to do penance, and again in the last ; the flames of carnal lust, pride and sensuality are the sins with which he reproaches himself most. Like all high-minded persons, he is little afraid of the second circle where the piteous vice of the narrow and small-minded, Envy, is punished with eyelids sewn together with a thread.

A serene atmosphere of hope pervades the second realm, from the beginning, coloured by the morning dawn, to the end with its strange charm as of twilight ; then a mysterious and starry night approaches, which will give place to a still brighter morning. The higher they mount the easier the ascent becomes ; one feels they are

getting ever farther from the earth and all terrestrial and ponderous things.

They ascend the mountains in a spiral line, resting at night; and at every new stair leading to a higher terrace the watching angel, by a waving of his wings, obliterates one of the P's on Dante's brow. In the third night they rest on the mountain's last step—immeasurably high above the waters and the earth. Dante now is free from earthly sin, and Virgil ends his task, saying:

> Look not for me to signal or to speak;
> Free, upright, healthy is thine own will now,
> And not to do as it commands were weak;
> So crowned and mitred, o'er thyself rule thou.

With the opening day they enter the earthly Paradise, a heavenly fragrant grove surrounds him, where birds sing and limpid waters flow; a beautiful lady

> Who as she went
> Sang evermore and gathered flower on flower,
> With whose bright hues her path was all besprent,

walks along the other shore. The verses in this part of the poem are of a strange picturesque beauty; they breathe an air of serene quiet; it is as if a man recovering from long illness and expecting joy and health, entering a beautiful landscape there meets a friend, who comes but to announce a still greater joy: for after Matilda follows Beatrice.

She approaches in the procession of the Church Triumphant. Seven flaming golden candlesticks—like moving trees of gold—come first, drawing their flames like pennons of rainbow-bands through the air; twenty-four sainted elders follow; then the car drawn by the

Gryphon, whose wings reach into heaven ; seven virgins and the four symbolic animals of the Evangelists stride at the chariot's side. Then follow two aged men, one holding the sword the other the key ; four humble men come next ; and, finally, alone and half asleep, he who, dwelling on Patmos, wrote the Apocalypse. Thunder is heard and the procession stops.

And one of them, as if by Heaven sent there,
Sang, "*Veni, Sponsa*, come from Lebanon ! "
Three times, and all the rest took up the air.

As at the last call every blessed one
Shall quickly from his cavern-tomb return,
And "*Alleluias*" sing with voice re-won,

So where the car divine was onward borne
A hundred rose *ad vocem tanti Senis*,
Angels and heralds of the life etern ;

And all said "*Benedictus es qui venis*,"
And, scattering flowers above them and around,
"*Manibus O date lilia plenis !*"

(PLUMPTRE.)

She who stands on the car, queenlike in look and gesture, whom he recognises by his own trembling, speaks out : "Gaze well upon me. Yes, I am, I am Beatrice ! "

How didst thou deem thee fit to climb the hill ?
Didst thou not know that here the blessed be ?
Mine eyes then fell upon the waters still,
But there myself beholding, to the grass
I turned, such shame upon my brow weighed ill.
She held her peace, and from the angels rang
"*In te speravi, Domine.*"

(PLUMPTRE.)

They pray for him, and the ice that lay around Dante's heart melts: he can weep. Beatrice, turning to the angels, addresses them in verses that remind us of the solemn beauty of the prologue of Faust:

Ye in the day eternal know no rest,
So that nor night nor sleep from you can steal
One step upon the world's great path imprest.

"You therefore know how that man," she says, "whom I once led on the right path * after my death and passage to glory, deserted me and faithlessly turned to ways which were not true."

O thou who art beyond the sacred stream . . .
Say, say if this be true or not!

A "Yes," stifled by tears and shame, is Dante's answer. Deeper guilt, of which Virgil did not know, is purged; Matilda dips his head in the waters of Lethe, the river of Forgetfulness, and Beatrice unveils her face to him. The dramatic intensity and musical force of these passages are indescribable; they certainly are the culminating part of the great poem.

Now follows that memorable vision, ending with the transformation and profanation of the car, representing the severance and fall of Church and Empire. Dante's poem is the world, and the two great catastrophes of his time are seen by him reflected in a mystical image on the summit of his earthly pilgrimage. With unheard-of audacity he dared to incorporate in his own destiny the world-shaking historical events in which he was so passionately interested.

One more draught from the sweet waters of Eunoe, the source of memory of all good, and he rises

* See chapter iii.

Pure and made meet to mount where shines each star.

. . . . . .

On this side noon, that midnight, neared their birth ;
And wholly bright was all one hemisphere,
The other swathed in gloom through all its girth,

When to the left I looked, beholding there
My Beatrice, turned to see the sun ;
Never did eagle's glance so fixed appear.

And as a second ray is wont to run
Forth from the first, and reascend on high,
Like pilgrim turning when his course is done,

So from her act, upon my phantasy
Through sight impressed, my own its birth did take,
And on the sun fixed unaccustomed eye.

There much may be that here the law would break
Which our sense limits, thanks to that high place
Fashioned that there mankind their home might make ·

Not long I bore it, nor for such short space
But that I saw the sparks fly all around,
As molten iron from furnace flows apace.

And suddenly it seemed as day were found
Added to day, as though the Omnipotent
With yet another sun the heaven had crowned.

And Beatrice, with her whole gaze bent
On the eternal spheres, stood still, and then
I, with my glance down-turned and eyes intent.

In gazing on her, felt within as when
Glaucos of old of that strange herb did eat,
Which with the sea-gods made him denizen.

To paint that life transhumanised unmeet
Were any words : this instance may suffice
Him for whom Grace keeps that experience sweet.

If I was then all Thou didst last devise
  In Thy creative work, Supremest Love
Thou know'st Who with Thy light did'st bid me rise.

When that high sphere Thou dost for ever move
  With strong desire, my thoughts towards it drew,
By music Thou dost temper and approve,

It seemed as though the sky so fiery grew
  With the sun's flame, that never rain nor flood
A lake across a wider surface threw.

The strange new sounds and wondrous light imbued
  My soul with such desire the cause to know,
As never until then had stirred my blood.

(PLUMPTRE.)

That is Dante's entrance into the Spheres. People who think it necessary to find fault call this third part weaker than the former, saying that Dante had attempted the impossible. It is true he repeatedly interrupts himself, saying: "I cannot describe what I saw; I was another when I was up there!" Yet I do not think that these words are an avowal of the poet's feeling of impotence to give adequate expression to his own surpassing imagination, but rather a trick to make the reader feel how much more grand and beyond all description the vision still was. It is true that Dante in this work tries to explain the supernatural by visible signs, to suggest what is beyond man's thoughts, to depict what is withdrawn from our sight, to speak what is unspeakable. But what of the superhuman a man's imagination can conceive and his art express he has fulfilled in this work. He was "trasumanato," carried beyond the limits of human nature, made susceptible of transcendent things.

Here every line is music that defies translation. The

numerous theological and scholastic discussions on Free Will and other topics may sometimes, interesting as they are, interrupt the rich poetical flow, but what do such little spots matter? By some persons the continual exultation, the ever-growing joy and rapture, the increasing songs of the blessed choirs have been found monotonous. I must think of what Goethe said:

> Wenn jeder Augenblick mich durchschauert,
> Was soll ich fragen, wie lang es gedauert?

The moments of light which Dante paints are of a variation and cumulative power, and of a rising force of ecstasy, that to me seems the highest that human art ever has performed in face of the most difficult task: the expression of the triumph of good. The whole poem is the culminating-point of Christian poetry, the highest fruit of Christian civilisation.

Dante passes through the heavens with Beatrice, "as a ray passes through glass." The spirits, whose seat is the Empyrean, appear in the lower heavens as pale pearls in transparent water; but they become even more radiant and bright the farther he ascends from heaven to heaven. Ever stronger and sweeter becomes the light as well as the music.

> "To Father, Son, and Holy Ghost," began
> That *Gloria*, chanted by all Paradise,
> And I was drunk with joy, so sweet it ran.
>
> It was as though a smile did meet mine eyes
> From all creation, so that joy's excess,
> Through sight and hearing did my mind surprise.
>
> O bliss, O joy, no mortal may express!
> O life, filled full with love and peace, good store!
> O riches. free from selfish eagerness!
>
> (PLUMPTRE.)

That is in the eighth heaven, where Christ and the angels appear to him, where Gabriel descends in a robe of flames to crown the Virgin, where Dante makes his confession of faith to the Apostles, and Adam explains to him the fall of man. Then St. Peter speaks of his Vicar on earth, while the skies darken around him.

The exulting verse gives way to accents of terrible anger and indignation against him

> Who occupies my place on earth, *my* place!

From the ninth heaven Dante sees the nine choirs of angels, who revolve the nine heavens around the earth, themselves turning in radiant circles faster and ever faster around one sparkling point of ineffable light. That conception is of an unexampled grandeur: that which in the world of the senses seemed to turn slowly and heavily around the earthly centre of man, here in the spiritual world, which is the truly real one, is seen gyrating around God.

But soaring ever higher he has already reached the Empyrean itself.

> In fashion of a white rose glorified
> Shone out on me that saintly chivalry,
> Whom with His blood Christ won to be His bride;
>
> But the other host, which, as it soars on high,
> Surveys, and sings, the glory of its love,
> The goodness, too, that gave it majesty,—
>
> As swarm of bees that deep in flowerets move
> One moment, and the next again return
> To where their labour doth its sweetness prove,—
>
> Dipped into that great flower which doth adorn
> Itself with myriad leaves, then mounting, came
> There where its love doth ever more sojourn.

Their faces had they all of living flame,
  Their wings of gold, and all the rest was white,
That snow is none such purity could claim.

And to the flower from row to row their flight
  They took, and bore to it the peace and glow,
Gained by them as they fanned their flanks aright.

Nor did the crowd then moving to and fro,
  Between the flower and that which rose above,
Impede the sight or splendour of the show;

Seeing that the light of God doth freely move
  Through the whole world, as merit makes it right,
So that nought there can hindrance to it prove.

This realm, secure and full of great delight,
  Filled with the hosts of old or later time,
To one sole point turned love alike and sight.

O Trinal Light, that in one star sublime
  Dost with thy rays their soul so satisfy,
Look down with pity on our storm-beat clime!

(PLUMPTRE.)

Once more all the bitterness of the exile bursts forth in his verse. If the barbarians once stood aghast in face of the splendour of Imperial Rome, think how I was stunned—

I, who to God had now passed on from man,
  From time to that great sempiternal day,
From Florence to a people just and sane.

Beatrice sits already high above him in her place near the Virgin, and from the depth of his heart he sends his prayer of thanks up to her. St. Bernard now steps in her place, and for him speaks that famous prayer to which no translation will ever do justice:

O Virgin Mother, daughter of thy Son,
Lowlier and loftier than all creatures seen,
Goal of the counsels of the Eternal One,

Thyself art she who this our nature mean
Hast so ennobled that its Maker great
Deigned to become what through it made had been.

In thy blessed womb the Love renewed its heat
By whose warm glow in this our peace eterne
This heavenly flower first did germinate.

Here, in Love's noon-tide brightness, thou dost burn
For us in glory; and to mortal sight
Art living fount of hope to all that yearn.

Lady, thou art so great and of such might,
That he who seeks grace yet turns not to thee,
Would have his prayer, all wingless, take its flight;

Nor only doth thy kind benignity
Give help to him who asks, but many a time
Doth it prevent the prayer in bounty free.

In thee is mercy, pity, yea, sublime
Art thou in greatness, and in thee, with it,
Whate'er of good is in creation's clime.

He who stands here, who, from the lowest pit
Of all creation, to this point hath pass'd
The line of spirits, each in order fit,

On thee for grace of strength himself doth cast,
So that he may his eyes in vision raise
Upwards to that Salvation noblest, last.

And I, who never for my power to gaze
Burnt more than now for his, pour all my prayer,
And pray it meet not failure nor delays:

Wherefore do thou all clouds that yet impair
His vision with mortality, remove.
That he may see the joy beyond compare.

And next I pray thee, Queen, whose power doth prove
Matched with thy will, that thou wilt keep his mind,
After such gaze, that thence it may not rove.

Let thy control all human impulse bind;
See Beatrice, how through my prayers she
And many a saint their hands in prayer have joined.

(PLUMPTRE.)

And Dante sees God. But here the song ends:

The force of his high fancy faileth him.

But his spirit already floats with the seraphic leader in the holy circle, willing, what is willed there, one with God, moved by that love

That moveth the Sun and all the other stars.

Now all is fulfilled that he had designed at the close of the "New Life," and even the wish expressed there had been granted. No human being will sustain such ecstasy. Not in vain has it been said, "He dies who saw Jehova's face."

The last gigantic scenes were scarcely finished when the soul left the shaken and exhausted body.

He died at Ravenna on September 14, 1321, on the day of the Erection of the Cross, while staying at the court of Guido da Polenta, with whom he had passed his last years. It is possible that on returning from Venice, where he had been sent as Guido's ambassador, he caught a fever in the swamps he had to pass, which led to his death. He was a little more than fifty-six years old.

He was buried in the Franciscan Convent, opposite the house in which he had dwelt.

We know as little about these last years as about the rest of his life. Yet it seems that here at least he was duly honoured; his embassy to Venice in the prince's name leaves no doubt of it.

Repeatedly the Florentines asked the people of Ravenna to return his bones to them, but always in vain. The last time they did so was in the year 1864.

In the year 1329 the Cardinal Bertrand du Poyet, who had ordered Dante's book, "De Monarchia," to be burnt in public, wanted to do the same with his bones, "to the eternal shame and extinction of his memory," and it would have been done but for the strenuous opposition of Pino della Tosa, a noble Florentine, and Messer Ostagio da Polenta, who prevented it.

In the quiet town of exiles, at the corner of the Via Dante, stands the little chapel with the monument and the two inscriptions, one of which, composed by Bernardo Canaccio, concludes with the strong verses:

Hic claudor Dantes patriis extorris ab oris,
Quem genuit parvi Florentia mater amoris.
(Here I am enclosed, Dante, exiled from my native country,
Whom Florence bore, the mother, that little did love him.)

In one corner above the portrait the words are written: "His non cedo malis." ("I do not give in to misfortune.")

The chapel touches the weathered tile-walls of the long-deserted cloister; behind an iron screen are seen the sarcophaguses of the Princes of the House of Polenta, the old tower of the convent looks over the wall. Grass grows at the margin of the solitary street—no resting-place could be more quiet.

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